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Lionel Lucas

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JILL



J I L L

BY

E. A. DILLWYN

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

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1884

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CHAPTER I.

A CHAPELLE MORTUAIRE.

IMMEDIATE preparations were made for our departure from the spot where we were. A couple of coarse handkerchiefs were tied across the lower part of our faces, so as to stifle our voices if we should uplift them on the remote chance of any one being in hearing who would assist us. Next our feet were untied to enable us to walk. We were warned that if we attempted to escape or to call out, we should be instantly stabbed. And in order to convince us that this was no empty threat, a wicked-looking, dagger-like article, known in Corsica as a vendetta-knife, was flashed before our eyes, and we were shown that each of our captors had one of these knives stowed away in a little inside coat-pocket, where it was ready to hand at a moment's notice.

Then we moved off in single file. Napoleon went in front, with Kitty close at his heels ; I came third, and César brought up the rear.

The robbers naturally selected to travel through the *maquis* rather than along the open road ; and we two captives, whose hands were bound, sorely missed the assistance of those members to push aside the numerous boughs and twigs by which our progress was impeded. Now and then the man in front stopped to hold back obstacles in some very thick place, where we should otherwise have probably altogether stuck fast ; but such an attention was exceptional, and, as a rule, we were left to make our way unaided as best we could, regardless of the scratches and bruises which we continually received, and whereby the discomfort and fatigue of the journey was greatly increased. Napoleon led us first down to the mouth of the valley; then branched off in a direction away from that which the carriage and Mrs. Rollin would take; then climbed a steep hill, and proceeded along the ridge of it for some distance ; then descended abruptly into another valley, and we were kept trudging over hill and dale alternately in this way during the whole afternoon. Many of the places we passed were such as might have roused a lover of fine scenery to enthusiasm ; but neither Kitty nor I were in a humour to appreciate that sort of thing just then, and the beauties of the landscape were quite wasted upon us, as we toiled

wearily along obscure and seldom-used tracks, through desolate wild districts, without ever once approaching a human dwelling.

My having made the men believe that neither of us understood Italian caused them to converse together in that language as unreservedly as if they had been alone, and, thanks to this, I was able to discover what were their intentions for disposing of us for the present. I learnt that we were being taken to a cave up in the hills, which had been their headquarters since their escape from prison. Here we were to be left under care of one of the robbers, whilst the other descended to the lower lands to seek out Mrs. Rollin, and open negotiations with her on the important subject of the ransom.

This cave of theirs, wherever it might be, was evidently an unpleasantly long way off from the scene of our capture. On and on we went without ever pausing for a moment ; and I grew so tired that I could hardly drag myself along, and began to speculate on the chances of having to be carried before the appointed resting-place would be reached. A slackening of speed or a halt would have been a most welcome relief to me ; but of that there was no hope, as our progress was already too slow to satisfy the robbers, who kept

constantly urging us to hurry on faster, lest we should all be benighted on the way. As daylight diminished, so did their impatience increase, and many were the angry oaths they uttered at the distance still to be traversed before attaining the cave.

Suddenly Napoleon stood still, and looked back at his comrade joyfully. “César,” cried he, “I have a good idea! At the rate we go now, we shall not get home till midnight; whereas if you and I were alone, and not hampered by these women, we should arrive in half the time. Is not that so?”

“Obviously,” grumbled César; “but what’s the use of stopping to tell me what I know already?”

“Why this,” returned the other; “that I propose we should disembarass ourselves of them at once.”

“Stupid!” rejoined César, irritably; “don’t you see that the only way of doing that is to kill them, or else to let them go; and that in either of those cases we should be throwing away all chance of deriving further gain from them?”

“Ah, but I have thought of another method of getting rid of them,” answered Napoleon—“a method which will enable us to keep them alive, and in our power too. I did a good deal of

business in this part of the country formerly, and learnt to know it well ; thus I came to know of a place near here, which I have only just recollect ed, and which will be most convenient to us at this moment. It is not exactly such a place as I would myself care to stay at, but it will do admirably for shutting up these two women in, and when we have disposed of them there, you and I can travel home as fast as we please. A famous safe prison it is, where there will be no need for one of us to stay and keep guard over them, as there would be if they were housed in the cave. Thus we shall be free to go together and see about the business with the ransom—which will, of course, be a great advantage, since two heads are better than one, you know.”

César seemed still incredulous. “I believe you are talking nonsense,” said he ; “I cannot think of any possible prison about here to answer to your description.”

“Nonsense, indeed !” retorted his companion ; “no, in truth ! A short distance from here, on the side of a hill, far from any inhabited house or public road, I remember that there is an old mortuary chapel. Years ago the family to whom it belonged left their country-house and went to live in Ajaccio ; and since then it has never been

used. This is the place in which I propose to imprison our captives. There will be no chance of their being heard, however much noise they may make ; for the walls are thick, and there is nothing to bring any one into the vicinity. And as they will certainly not be able to get out unaided, we shall have no need to trouble ourselves more about them, except to supply them with food.”

“A deserted mortuary chapel!” said César, reflectively ; “’tis a good idea, no doubt. Only—it is getting late ; and—well, to say the truth, I am not at any time over-fond of the company of the dead, and like it least of all by night. Still—it would be very convenient to do what you propose—the light is not gone yet—the chapel is close by, you say. Yes ! there will be time to shut up the women, and remove ourselves to a pleasanter neighbourhood before dark. Go on, then, and let us get the job over as soon as possible.”

Our course was resumed accordingly. The thought of the grim kind of hotel that Napoleon had found for us reminded me forcibly of Schubert’s song *Das Wirthshaus*, and I seemed to hear its wild plaintive melody sounding in my ears as we hurried over the broken ground through the

fast-increasing dusk. Horrible as was the idea of being immured alive in a tomb, yet I shrank from it less than than I should have done ordinarily. And for these two reasons: First, because the long march had reduced me to such a state of exhaustion that the prospect of rest was welcome anywhere—even in a *chapelle mortuaire*. Secondly, because it seemed safer and in every way preferable to be with the dead than with the two ruffians who had us in their power, and whom I regarded with the most profound distrust.

The chapel being near at hand, we reached it while there was still sufficient light to show something of the exterior of our prison.

We came first to a high wall, with no other opening in it than an iron gate, which was wide enough to admit a carriage. The bolt by which the gate was fastened was forced back without difficulty, and then a short straight bit of road brought us to the door of the chapel itself. This door was situated exactly opposite to the gate in the outer wall, and was secured by a great iron bar across the outside, and also by a chain and rusty padlock. With the help of a stone the men easily broke open the padlock, and then they lifted the ponderous external bar off its supports. There was now no further obstacle to opening the door before

which we stood, but our captors—being not insensible to superstitious fears—did not wish to keep the entrance to the charnel-house open longer than was absolutely necessary, and therefore postponed unclosing it till the last moment.

They set our hands at liberty, and delivered to us such provisions as they had with them—consisting of a morsel of sausage, a slice of rye-bread, a good-sized piece of extremely strong-smelling cheese, a couple of onions and apples, and a gourd half-full of wine. Having thus provided us against famine, César made us a profound bow of mocking deference, and said in French : “Adieu for the present, ladies. You see our desire to treat you with distinguished consideration induces us to place you here, with a good roof and strong walls to shelter you, rather than to take you to the rough cave which serves *us* for a habitation. We do not intend remaining to share this splendid dwelling with you, lest we should intrude on your privacy ; therefore we shall now, however unwillingly, tear ourselves away ; but first thing to-morrow morning we will return with a supply of food, before departing to seek out and communicate with the other lady.” Then, addressing himself to his comrade, he said : “Look sharp, Napoleon ; open a bit of the door, and in with them !”

The door, which only opened outwards, was pulled just far enough apart to admit a human body. The men, without adventuring their own persons an inch within the building, thrust Kitty and me roughly in, and at once closed the entrance behind us again. Then came a scraping, grating noise, which told that the great iron bar was being replaced on its supports outside, and immediately afterwards we heard the steps of César and Napoleon hurrying away at full speed from the uncanny neighbourhood of the tomb to which they had consigned us.

At first we stood without moving from the spot to which we had been pushed, just inside the door, waiting to see if we should be able to distinguish anything when our eyes had become accustomed to the darkness ; for the interior of the building was perfectly dark. Meanwhile we profited by the liberty that had been restored to our hands to remove the handkerchiefs across our mouths, which had hitherto prevented us from speaking.

Kitty's knowledge of Italian being limited, she had not comprehended what the men had been saying to one another ; consequently she did not now know the nature of our abode, as I discovered from the first words she uttered when her mouth was free of its gag :

"I wonder what sort of place this is," she said; "don't you? It's a bore to have no light; however, I'm going on a bit further, to explore without it, as we can't possibly have it."

I laid my hand upon her arm, and checked her as she was about to advance.

"You had better be careful how you move," I said; "we are shut up in a *chapelle mortuaire*."

"A *chapelle mortuaire*" she echoed, interrogatively; "let me see—what is that? Oh I remember! Wasn't that the name of those buildings which you told me you had seen near Ajaccio, and which you called 'villa residences for the dead?'"

"Yes," I replied, doing my best to speak unconcernedly and carelessly, and to conceal from her the feeling of disgust and aversion with which the place inspired me, and which was growing stronger every moment; "rather an appropriate place for me too, I think, seeing that I'm nearly dead with fatigue. I haven't the least wish to move about, and intend to sit down just where I am now. The door will make a capital back to lean against."

I was not sure but what the knowledge of where she was might perhaps prove a shock to Kitty's nerves. But there was no trace of discomposure to be detected in her voice or manner as she answered me. "So it will," she said, "and

I vote that we have dinner at once. Those wretches never offered us any five o'clock tea ; and what with that and the long walk, I'm quite ravenous ! You've no idea what a relief to my mind it was to find that they didn't intend to leave us all night without food."

Of course we both wanted to seem as happy and as much at our ease as possible, in order thus to help to keep up each other's spirits. I, however, was not very successful in the effort; for though I was perfectly free from any dread of the supernatural, yet there were material horrors attached to the position which I could not forget. I thought of the sights that would be revealed if there were light ; of the grinning skulls, mouldering bodies, crumbling coffins, and ghastly relics of mortality, which might be expected in a tomb ; and I remembered that these things must be so close to me that I might perhaps at any moment strike my hand against them. There was a gruesomeness and eeriness about the place, to which my state of bodily exhaustion rendered me unwontedly susceptible, and I felt more nervous and creepy than I had ever done in my life before.

"I don't think that I *can* eat in this terrible place," I said, with an involuntary shiver, in response to Kitty's suggestion of dinner.

Whether or not she was at all inclined to be affected by our dismal surroundings, as I was, I do not know ; at all events she did not show it, and redoubled her efforts to raise my spirits when she perceived how much disposed I was to break down.

"Oh yes—you'll not think of where you are in a few minutes more, when you've got used to it," she returned, seating herself beside me, and proceeding to distribute the food. "What a funny idea to have a picnic in the dark—quite novel, too ; I daresay no one ever did it before. Where is the bread? Oh you've got it. As for the cheese, there's no need to ask where *that* is, because one's nose may safely be trusted to supply the requisite information. I must say a knife would be rather handy ; but I'm afraid we must do the best we can without, for I left my pocket-knife where I was sketching, and Messieurs César and Napoleon have omitted to provide for our wants in that respect. How lucky that my aunt is not with us, and obliged to dine in this primitive fashion, without any proper appurtenances ! If she were, I verily believe she'd be unhappy lest any acquaintance should behold her in the act of committing such an enormity—even though the fact of the spectator would involve light to see by, and a

chance of assistance ; both of which *I* should consider to be most desirable things at this moment."

Thus she ran on, joking, laughing, making light of every discomfort, and chatting to me as if she had thought me her equal, as if the tomb had been a leveller of ranks to the living as well as to the dead, and as if in entering it all social differences between her and me had been annihilated. She could have devised nothing better adapted to accomplish her object, and help me to shake off the gloomy influences that oppressed me. Her example of bright good humour and courage was irresistible, and before our unilluminated repast had progressed far I became myself again, and eager to show a spirit as brave as her own. To this desirable result, too, the creature comforts of which I partook tended not a little to contribute. Though the victuals were hardly to be called choice, and the wine had acquired a nasty flavour from the gourd in which it was contained, nevertheless they revived me as well as the most sumptuous cates could have done ; and when dinner was at an end I was a different creature from what I had been before. Kitty made no comment on the change in me, but I have little doubt that she perceived it, all the same, as she now, for the first time, turned the conversation seri-

ously to the predicament in which we found ourselves.

"It seems to me, Jill," she said, "that you and I are having to do penance, with a vengeance, for our disbelief in escaped *penitenciers*! We must give our minds now to what we are to do next; but before entering on that subject I want to tell you how *very* sorry I am to have been the means of bringing you into this scrape. I can't help feeling that it is all my doing, and that if I had not gone on to sketch, or had not taken you with me, you, at all events, would be in safety at this moment."

Proud as she might be, pride had not yet taken enough hold of her to crush the naturally generous disposition which was more distressed at being the cause of another person's sufferings than at having to suffer itself. I was touched at the thoughtfulness on my account evinced by her last speech; and as I did not wish her to blame herself unfairly, I assured her that I had accompanied her quite as much for my own pleasure as hers. And in order to prove that we should not in any case have got off scot-free, I repeated to her the conversation I had overheard before we were captured, from which it appeared that the carriage would have been attacked if she and I had not separated from it and walked on alone.

"Thank you," she said, when I had completed my tale. "I can't tell you what a comfort it is to me to know all that, and to think that I am not the sole cause of this bother! And now to consider our next proceedings. The two things chiefly borne in upon my mind at this moment are—first, that it's no use blinking the fact of our being in an extremely awkward position; and second, that it won't do to be afraid, because fear, as Solomon says, 'is nothing else but a betraying of the succours which reason offereth.'"

This was no doubt true. But, unluckily, no amount of calmness and courage would show us any reasonable prospect of escape—look at the situation in what way we would.

It was no use to hope that our friends would rescue us, since it was manifestly impossible for them to have an idea where we were. When Mrs. Rollin continued her journey from the place where we had left her, she would, we knew, have reckoned on my remaining on the road, whether Kitty did or not. Consequently she would have gone on driving contentedly towards St. Lucie di Tallano without the least fear of leaving us behind ; and there was no saying how long it might have been before either she or the driver became uneasy at not overtaking us. Then, when they *did* take alarm—as

they must have done, sooner or later—there was nothing to make them suspect what had really happened. They would probably suppose we had simultaneously expired, tumbled over cliffs, sprained our ankles, or fallen victims to some other likely or unlikely catastrophe; and then they would have begun hunting about vaguely for us, without the slightest clue to where we were. Thus it was in vain to trust to external aid reaching us, and the question was, Could we anyhow manage to escape by our own unassisted exertions? Alas! the prospect was no better in that direction either. The door through which we had entered was the only outlet apparent; and that was, as we knew, fastened on the outside by a great heavy bar, which rendered exit in that way impossible. Shouting was of no avail, because the place was so solitary that we might have screamed till we were hoarse without a chance of producing any other effect.

Altogether, therefore, we saw no possible means of getting away from our prison, and came reluctantly to the conclusion that we had no alternative but to resign ourselves to stay where we were, and await the course of events patiently. This was by no means a satisfactory termination of our deliberations, and, having arrived at it, we sat in melancholy silence for a minute. The silence was broken

by Kitty who said cheerily : “ I’m sure we shall both be the better for some rest, so let us lie down and go to sleep.”

“ Lie down ! ” repeated I ; “ surely that won’t be safe, will it ? It’s too dark to see, and there might be—well—things that one wouldn’t care to touch, knocking about in a place of this kind, you know. I should think we’d best try and go to sleep without changing our present position.”

“ No ; we shouldn’t rest nearly as well sitting upright, as we should lying down,” answered Kitty ; “ and it won’t do for us to play tricks with our strength in any way, or to risk losing an atom of it that is to be had. Very likely there may be nothing disagreeable up the middle of the floor, or, at all events, nothing that we cannot easily clear away. Let us stoop down and feel our way straight before us till we have a space to lie down in.”

There seemed a tacit agreement between us that the ghastly objects by which we knew we must surely be surrounded were not to be defined in words, but to be kept strictly to ourselves, lest the imagination of one should supply some additional detail which had not occurred to that of the other, by which means the horrors of the situation might have been considerably increased. I am sure this was a wise precaution. As it was, I know

I found my imagination vivid enough to picture a good deal more than was at all agreeable to think of; and it would, no doubt, have been still more troublesome if supplemented by that of Kitty also.

I did not by any means relish her proposal that we should clear sufficient space to lie down on; for I could not help shuddering at the thought of the things one might expect to come in contact with when groping about without light in a *chapelle mortuaire*. Still, I was not going to have her despise me as a fool or a coward, so I made no objection, and set to work heroically to perform my share of the unpleasant task.

The only suspicious thing which I met with in the course of my explorations was some small-sized object, whose substance was cold and clammy, and whose identity I could not at all determine by touch. An exclamation of disgust rose to my lips when my fingers came against this unknown horror; but I managed to restrain any outward manifestation of emotion, and merely pushed the obstruction aside quietly, without letting Kitty know that I had found anything unpleasant.

As I made this effort to spare her feelings, I was struck by the quaint probability of her being at the same instant engaged in a similar endeavour to spare mine; and I realised that the common

danger to which we were exposed was a link which united us so firmly that our separate identities were, for the time being, well-nigh merged into one. Whatever affected the condition of one of us must necessarily affect that of the other also; whence it followed that the bodily and mental welfare of both was a matter of mutually vital consequence, and that each was as anxious to shield the other as herself from any annoyance or shock that could possibly be avoided. Truly a queer sort of selfish unselfishness!

It did not take us long to make sure that we had room to lie down without fear of coming against any repulsive relics of mortality; then we extended ourselves upon the ground, pressing closely together for warmth, as the night was cold. Hard and rough as was the couch, and perilous as was our situation, we were too tired to be kept waking by either discomfort or anxiety, and were speedily asleep.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW USE FOR A BIER.

As I had no means of knowing the time, I cannot say exactly how long my slumbers lasted, but, as near as I can guess, it must have been about a couple of hours before I awoke. On opening my eyes I saw, with much surprise, that the moon had found its way into the tomb, as there was a patch of yellow light shining upon the opposite wall, and relieving the profound obscurity that reigned elsewhere. This was a most cheering and hope-inspiring spectacle ; for, as the door was still closed as before, the moonlight certainly could not be entering in that way ; and the obvious deduction was, that the chapel walls must have some second opening which we had not yet discovered. Whatever it was, might we not escape through it ?

I aroused the still sleeping Kitty to point out to her the pleasant sight, and we got upon our feet to examine into the matter more nearly. The light was evidently admitted through some aperture

situated in the gable of the roof just above the doorway, and the shadows by which the patch of light was traversed proved that the aperture was defended by bars. What the object of the opening may have been I know not,—perhaps ornament, perhaps ventilation, perhaps some whim of the architect's. Anyhow, there it was; and though darkness had prevented our seeing it on our first arrival at the chapel, yet now the friendly moon had come to our assistance, and was indicating it as a possible means of regaining liberty. Never in my life had I felt such a sincere admiration for the moon, and such a conviction of its utility to the world, as I did then.

We were at that time standing where we had lain down, close to the door, and the aperture was too immediately over our heads for us to see it very well, so we advanced cautiously a few steps farther towards the middle of the floor, in order to obtain a better view. On looking up from this new point of observation, we saw that though the hole was small, it nevertheless appeared to be large enough for an ordinary sized person to be able to squeeze through, provided the bars were out of the way. This was encouraging. But it remained to be proved, first, whether we could get up so high without having any ladder or other

means of raising ourselves ; and secondly, whether, if we surmounted that difficulty, we should be able to remove the obstructing bars without having tools to assist us.

It was very certain that the window was too high up for us to get at it from the ground, since it was above the door, and I, who was taller than Kitty, could only just touch the top of the door with my finger-tips when I stretched out my arm to its fullest extent. How on earth, then, were we to elevate ourselves to the height of the window ? The first suggestion was, that if one of us was lifted up, perhaps she might be able to reach the desired niche, and we at once put the idea into execution. I, being the strongest and heaviest of the two, was naturally appointed to be the lifter ; so I took hold of Kitty round the knees, and raised her up as far as I could. My utmost efforts, however, failed to get her to the required height, and I had to set her down again without having advanced an atom towards the accomplishment of our purpose.

“ I’m sure I wasn’t far short of touching the ledge of the window,” she said, whilst I stood panting after my exertions ; “ if only I could get hold of that, and you were to help me by shoving, I expect I could pull myself right up, and manage

to hitch on somehow to examine the bars. What we want is some kind of elevation for you to stand on when you lift me. Do try and invent some hoisting contrivance or other; it would be too provoking not to get up to the window now we've found it."

For a while we racked our brains vainly without discovering any solution of the problem. At last an idea flashed across my mind. No!—I would not mention such a thing—it was too horrible. Yet what I had thought of was a method whereby we might perhaps supply such an elevation as we wanted. And the unpleasantness of that method was no sufficient reason for being silent about it, when the urgent peril in which we were made it absurd to allow mere sentimental considerations to stand in the way of any possible chance of escape. Therefore I conquered my repugnance for the idea that had occurred to me, and said: "There must be coffins in this place. Very likely they are all more or less fallen to pieces, for Napoleon said that it had not been used for a long time; but yet some of the wood may still be sound, and perhaps if we grope about we may be able to collect enough boards to make a stage that would serve our purpose."

Kitty did not answer immediately. I daresay

that she recoiled from the idea at first, as I had done. But if so, no doubt second thoughts showed her, as they had me, the imperative necessity of regarding matters from an exclusively practical, stern, and unimaginative point of view, and of absolutely ignoring any fanciful objections to whatever promised to aid our flight. She replied, after a short pause :

“ Well, it is not a very attractive plan, certainly ; but as there doesn’t seem to be any other, I suppose we had better try it, and endeavour to forget its unpleasantness by looking forward to the delights of liberty if it succeeds. So now let’s go to work. It’s a pity neither of us was ever inside a *chapelle mortuaire* before, isn’t it ? because then we should have some notion of how such places are generally arranged, which would be a great assistance to us just now in this pitchy darkness. As it is, however, I suppose we must imagine what the plan of the interior is *likely* to be like, and then proceed according to that idea. If I were an undertaker I think I should first deposit the coffins in a row along the wall, then pile them up, two or three deep perhaps, and only take up the middle of the floor when the sides were all occupied. Therefore I recommend our exploring the sides first, as likely to afford the largest supply of wood. Do you go

to the right, whilst I take the left—unless you have anything better to suggest?"

I had not; so we separated, and went off to the right and left respectively, as she wished. But I had hardly got a yard away from the door when she exclaimed, "Come here, Jill; I want you!"

"Yes; what is it?" inquired I, as I crossed over to her.

"I've found something that seems to me promising," she replied eagerly. "I struck my hand against it directly I had got beyond the doorway. What it is I don't know; but it's pretty big anyhow, and it's not part of a coffin, and it's made of wood. I want you to help me feel it over, and see if we can make it out."

We began carefully investigating the unknown object with our fingers, and endeavouring to recognise by touch its shape and construction. For a while it puzzled us; then suddenly Kitty had an idea and said :

"Do you think it's a bier? I never handled one before, but I daresay it would feel something like this does. And it's not unlikely that it might have been left here and forgotten after the last funeral, is it?"

"No; that's it, depend upon it!" cried I; "and it's a grand discovery, for a bier will help to raise

us capitally, if only it's not got rotten, lying here so long."

To ascertain its condition was our first anxiety. Accordingly we took hold of the handles, lifted it off the ground, and gave it a smart shake, though not without considerable misgivings lest it should come to pieces in our hands. Fortunately it stood the test tolerably well, and did not break down. At the same time, however, it quivered and cracked in a way that did not give the impression of its being in very first-rate order ; and we decided that it would be imprudent to expose it to the trial of bearing both of us simultaneously. If it would support one at a time, we would make no further demands upon its powers of endurance ; and consequently we must utilise it in some other way than by my standing on it and lifting Kitty up to the window, as was our first idea.

Instead of that we raised it lengthwise, and placed it so that the handles at one end rested on the ground, whilst those at the other were against the door. When thus erected the upper part of the body of the bier was, of course, a good deal elevated, and made a foothold whence the window could easily be attained. To mount to this foothold was now our intention ; and Kitty, being the lightest, was selected to ascend first. The only

question was, How was she to get her foot to the top of the bier, which was too high up for any legs of ordinary length to step up to from the ground. But this obstacle was quickly smoothed away by my stooping down and converting myself into a stepping-stone. Mounted on me, and steadyng herself against the door, she put one foot cautiously on the edge of the bier, and began to press upon it. The heavier she leant on it, the more ominously did it crack and tremble; still it did not give way, even when she at last stood upon it altogether, and it had to bear the whole of her weight. Hurrah! now we should know what the window looked like at close quarters; and whether the bars were wooden or iron, loose or tight, removable or not.

Kitty's report was satisfactory. She said that the window had a ledge on the inside which was broad and deep enough for a person to sit on by crouching a good deal, and that the bars were only wooden.

"Are they breakable?" I asked anxiously.

"Don't know yet," she returned; "I shall be able to tell better if I get right up on the ledge. They don't *feel* very solid; but I'm afraid of trying them from here. You see I'm not very confident of the stability of my present foothold, and don't care

to indulge in violent exertions till I get to a safer situation. Wrestling with the bars where I am now *might* lead to an upset. If you'll help me by pushing below, I will draw myself up on to the ledge."

By dint of our united efforts, the further ascent was accomplished successfully. The ledge did not afford a very comfortable resting-place, as she had to sit bent nearly double, with her feet hanging down against the wall. But the position, though cramped and inconvenient, was secure, and was a firm point of vantage from which to attack the bars. She took hold of one, and shook it. Being completely rotted through, it came in two in her hand at once. The next offered a more obstinate resistance; in this also, however, as well as in the others, decay had begun, and had gone too far for the wood to withstand her vigorous jerks, pushes, pulls, shakes, and blows. Therefore it was not very long before she announced triumphantly that there was now nothing to hinder our egress through the window, which was, as we had thought, big enough for us to pass through.

"There's one thing I don't quite see, though," she said, after poking out her head and reconnoitring the exterior; "that is, how we're to get down on the other side. It looks to me rather far for a drop. I should say it would be a toss up whether

we did it safely, or whether we broke our legs. Of course we must risk it if there's nothing else to be done; but if there *is* any other way of descending—why, I think it would be better."

"Is there room for us both to be on the ledge at the same time?" I inquired, after a moment's reflection; "because if I were up there by you, I might break the fall considerably by reaching down and holding you up when you drop. And then when you are down, you may be able to find some way of breaking the fall for me. Even if not, it would not matter so much for me. I think I could drop the distance without hurting myself; for when I was a child I used to do a deal of jumping and climbing, and was always good at falling light."

"Well—we might try that, at all events," she answered, "if the ledge is large enough to hold us both at the same time. I'm doubtful whether it is—but we can soon see. Wait a moment and I'll make more room by turning round, and sitting with my feet out instead of in. There—now they're out of the way. Come and stand on the top of the bier, and see if you can stow yourself away up here by my side."

It now for the first time struck us that it was by no means sure whether I should be able to get to the top of the bier without having any one to

assist me from below as I had assisted Kitty. Yet if I failed to reach that point, I must give up the idea of reaching the window; and as that was equivalent to resigning my hopes of liberty, it was evidently of the utmost importance that I should accomplish the ascent.

Kitty was the first to suggest a way out of the difficulty.

"Can you alter the position of the bier," said she, "so as to make it slant, instead of standing almost upright as it does now? Because then you might manage to creep up it."

"I've no doubt I can, only I hadn't thought of it," replied I, proceeding to drag the two lower handles away from the door, till the steepness of the incline was much less than before. Then I grasped the upper edge of the bier, and tried, partly by pulling and partly by crawling, to bring my feet up to where my hands were. Alas! the woodwork that was firm enough to support Kitty, standing upon it quietly, had not strength to bear a person of my greater weight, scrambling up it as I was doing. Collapsing altogether, it brought me violently to the ground with a crash which alarmed Kitty, who, on her perch overhead, half in and half out, could not see what was happening in the darkness beneath.

"Oh, Jill!" she exclaimed, "what is it? Are you hurt?"

"No," I answered, feeling ready to cry with vexation, as I rose, and cleared away the *débris* of broken wood with which I was covered. "I wasn't far enough off the ground for that. But the old bier has smashed all to pieces; and however I'm to get up to the window now, I'm *sure* I don't know!"

"Are you certain," she returned, "that there isn't any sound corner still holding together, which would do for you to stick up, and stand on? It's worth while for you to feel about on chance of such a thing, at all events."

This was true; and I explored carefully amongst the splintered fragments in hopes of discovering some solid bit. But my efforts were in vain.

"It's no use," said I, ruefully; "the thing is gone to pieces completely."

Neither of us spoke for a while after this. First I exhausted my ingenuity in vain endeavours to discover some means of raising myself to the window. Then, when I made up my mind that I was doomed to remain a captive, I began to reflect enviously on the superior good fortune of Kitty. The only thing between her and freedom was the trivial difficulty of getting down safely on the

other side. Once that was overcome, she would be off, and leave me by myself in this abominable place. I did not at all like the idea of her going. For one thing, I preferred having a companion in misfortune to being solitary. And for another thing, her absence would greatly aggravate my danger, as the *penitenciers* would be sure to be rendered furious by her having given them the slip, and would vent their wrath upon me. Of course, if she were to fall in with efficient succour, and return before they did, it would be a different matter. But then the chance of that seemed too remote to be worth reckoning on ; and I thought it was decidedly more to my interest that she should stay with me than that she should regain her liberty alone.

Why did she sit up there silently without saying anything about her departure ? I wondered. Ah ! probably she hadn't yet discovered a satisfactory method of managing the descent outside, which she seemed to think difficult. *I* could tell her how it was to be done, if I chose—but then I wasn't going to chose anything of the kind. If her own wits couldn't show her how to profit by her advantages, then let her stay where she was, and keep me company !

These were the thoughts that first crossed my

mind, when I recognised the melancholy fact that I had no chance of escape. Yet, somehow or other, I did not eventually hold my tongue, as I had intended to do, about the means by which her descent might be accomplished. What induced me to change my mind about it I don't exactly know. Perhaps the fancy that I had for her may have been stronger than I realised, and have made it impossible for me to refrain from doing whatever I could to get her out of the power of two such ruffians as César and Napoleon. Or perhaps I may have been influenced by the obvious unreasonableness of allowing two people to be exposed to a danger from which one of them might escape. Anyhow, the upshot of it was that I said—though not without an effort :

“ I've thought of a way for you to get down from the window without damaging yourself. We'll tie our dresses, jackets—petticoats too, if need be—into a rope which must be long enough to go through the window and dangle down outside, whilst I keep hold of one end in here. The outside end must have a loop for you to put your feet in ; and with the help of that, I'm pretty sure we can make the drop safe. Then, if you should be lucky about falling in with respectable people soon, perhaps you may be able to come back and

get me away before the *penitenciers* reappear in the morning."

As I believed her to be only staying there because she did not know how to get away, I took it for granted that she would be delighted at my suggestion, and be in a desperate hurry to avail herself of it. Instead of that, however, she only said coolly :

"Thank you, Jill ; but I think it's perfectly impossible that I should find help and return in time to rescue you, so I don't at all contemplate going off alone, and leaving you to face the indignation of César and Napoleon at my departure. Goodness knows what they wouldn't do to you ! No ; I was the means of getting you into this scrape, and I don't seem to see leaving you to shift for yourself now. If there's no alternative between deserting you or taking up my abode again inside the chapel—why, I prefer the latter. But it's too soon to despair yet. Having got *one* of us up here is something ; and it won't do to abandon that advantage until we're quite positive that we can't turn it to account. There's your first plan of trying to get enough wood to make a platform—why not take to that again ?"

"For two reasons," said I, with a thrill of inde-

scribable happiness and comfort at finding that she was too staunch and plucky for there to be a chance of her deserting me. "In the first place there isn't time, because I should only get on at half the pace by myself that we should have done working together. And besides that, I think that the rottenness of the bier and bars is a conclusive proof that there isn't likely to be any sound wood discoverable here."

"True," she returned. Immediately afterwards she added, exultingly, "What idiots we are! As the men hadn't a key, they can't possibly have locked us in, and there can't be any fastening except the bar across the outside of the door. We never thought of that! As soon as I get down and take away the bar, you can march out without trouble. Off with your dress, and let's make that rope you talked of to let me down with!"

It seems extraordinary that neither of us had remembered this simple solution of the difficulty sooner; yet so it was. Now that it had at last occurred to us, however, we lost no time in going to work. Our garments were instantly put into requisition, and twisted and knotted into as good an imitation of a rope as we could construct out of such materials. The end which had a loop to it was hung out of window, whilst I retained the

other end in my hands, and Kitty, placing her feet in the loop, began to lower herself gently.

As long as she could keep hold of the window her weight was thrown partly on her hands ; thus I had not the whole of it to support until during the last few seconds, when, taking her feet out of the loop, letting go of the window, and clinging only to the rope, she descended as near as she could to the ground. I held on to the rope with might and main, till the tension relaxed with a sudden jerk that threw me down, and informed me that she had regained *terra firma*.

“Sprained ankle, broken bones, or anything of that kind ?” I asked, anxiously.

“No, not hurt a bit,” was the welcome response. “I’ll get the door open as quickly as I can ; will you begin undoing the rope meanwhile ?”

“All right !” I returned, commencing to restore it to its normal condition of clothes as fast as I could in the dark. As I worked I listened hopefully to the scratching and fumbling that went on outside, and expected every moment to hear the downfall of the bar. But the minutes passed on, and still the looked-for sound did not come. I could not understand what could be causing so much delay about so simple a matter as removing a bar from across a door, and I began to grow

feverishly nervous lest any unforeseen obstacle should even now intervene, and deprive me of the freedom I had begun to anticipate confidently. My alarm was not unfounded, for, to my dismay, she called out :

“ This bar is so dreadfully heavy that I can’t raise it. I can only move one end at a time, and lift it up a very small way above the support it stands on ; but not high enough for what I want.”

Then it was all over with me, and I was fated to stay there alone to be cut to pieces, or murdered in any way that might seem good to those two ruffians ! And when I had thought, too, that I was so sure of getting away ! The bitterness of the disappointment seemed to choke me for a minute, so that I could not speak. However, when I could control my voice, I shouted to her :

“ There’s no help for it ! You can’t get back inside again now, even if you wish to. So you’ve no choice about going away. Goodbye !”

“ I’m not at an end of my resources yet,” she replied. “ I’ve thought of something fresh. I’m going away for a few minutes, but I shall be back directly.”

The sound of her steps gave me notice of her departure from and return to the chapel. Then

ensued much scraping, scratching, and other noises, to which I listened with intense anxiety, longing to know what she was about, yet fearing to ask, lest, if I interrupted her with questions, I might perhaps hinder my deliverance.

Her operations meanwhile, as I afterwards learnt, were as follows :—First, she went to fetch a supply of stones of various sizes. Returning with these, she put her shoulder underneath one end of the bar, and exerting all her strength, raised it as high as she could above the broad projecting piece of iron on which it rested. Then, before removing her shoulder, she inserted between the iron support and the bar enough stones to maintain the latter at the place to which she had raised it. This performance many times repeated, at last elevated that end so far above the other that the bar was all slanting, and only needed one vigorous push to set it in motion, sliding downwards across the iron projection on which the opposite end was supported. Moving slowly at first, the massive bar went faster and faster every instant as its own weight gave it additional impetus, till it dashed on to the ground with a resounding clang that seemed to me the sweetest music that ever gladdened the ears of mortal man or woman. I immediately pushed against the door.

It yielded slowly, and next minute I was emancipated from that horrible *chapelle mortuaire*, and standing beside Kitty, free in the open air once more.

To describe the rapture of that moment is beyond my powers. If any one wants to know true bliss for once in their lives, I recommend them to go through a similar experience. Only they must take into account the possibility of *not* escaping after all ; which is evidently a serious drawback, since a failure in that respect would be quite fatal to the object of the experiment.

CHAPTER III.

OFF FROM CORSICA.

WE had no means of knowing how far advanced the night might be, but we knew that our enemies intended to return early in the morning ; we saw that the moon was waning, and we naturally wished to get away from the vicinity of the *chapelle mortuaire* with all possible expedition. Having been obliged to partially undress ourselves in order to find materials for the rope, we began hastily resuming such articles of attire as had been taken off ; whilst thus engaged Kitty said :

“ It seems to me rather a chance that we don’t run straight into the arms of those two villains when we leave this place. I don’t the least know which way to go ; for, except that we’re in Corsica, I have uncommonly little notion of where we are. Have you ? ”

“ Well, only this much,” I replied ; “ in coming here we travelled a good deal more uphill than down, so I expect we must be in rather high

ground. And when our captors left us I heard them say they were going to a cave in the mountains, so they will be coming here from somewhere above. Therefore, I think, we must obviously guide ourselves by the rule of going always down-hill, if we want to reach a safe district, and keep out of harm's way."

"Yes; there's sense in that," answered she. "Downhill shall be our rule, as you say. But first of all, here's this enclosing wall to be got out of. We shall have to find some way of climbing over it, unless we can open the gate."

Luckily, however, the gate had only been swung to, and not fastened; so we had no difficulty in passing through it. Outside there was a roughly made road, much overgrown in consequence of long disuse, and going in two opposite directions.

"Come along," said Kitty; "roads almost always lead *somewhere*, and it is to be hoped this one is no exception; then we shall find ourselves at some inhabited locality or other at last. The way to the right goes downwards, I think."

Off we set to the right, therefore, at full speed, and ran ourselves out of breath; then we walked till we had got enough fresh wind to begin running again; then ran till we were blown again; and so

on, recommencing as before, and ever and anon listening anxiously for any sounds of pursuit. For though it was not yet the time when the robbers had announced they would return to us, yet our fears suggested the possibility of their having changed their minds, and gone back to the *chapelle* sooner than they had intended. Presently the moon set; and after that the unevenness of the track and the darkness combined caused us to stumble, slip, and fall several times. But we did not slacken pace on that account, and continued our headlong flight, till at last we came to a road which was so much broader and better than the one we had hitherto been following, that we had little doubt of its being the *route nationale*.

We had now a comfortable sensation of being once more within reach of protection ; and shortly afterwards we were yet further cheered by a sound behind us of wheels, horses' feet, and jingling bells, which announced that some vehicle was approaching. We hailed it as soon as it came up to us ; but found, to our disgust, that our shouts produced no effect ; for no one paid the slightest attention to them, and the thing lumbered heavily past in the darkness, giving a general impression of length and bulk which made us guess it to be a diligence, though we could not see it clearly. Having no

fancy to be thus ignored and left behind, we gave chase, and quickly overtook the slowly-moving conveyance as it crawled up a hill. Being one of the mail diligences it had a letter-box hanging at the back, just above a broad low step, which it was easy to mount and descend from whilst the vehicle was in motion ; thus any one with letters to post could jump up, consign them to the box, and get down again without causing any stoppage, so that the diligence was a sort of moving post-office. This step was most convenient to us at this moment. There was room enough for us both to sit upon it, and we very soon established ourselves in this muddy but not uncomfortable situation, rejoicing greatly at the welcome rest and security which it afforded. None of the people inside the diligence attempted to dislodge us, or took any notice of us, so I imagine either that our proceeding must have been too ordinary a one to attract attention, or else that they were all fast asleep. On the horses trotted again when the top of the hill was reached ; the mud-splashes bespattered us freely, and we had to hold tight for fear of being shaken off by some severer jolt than usual ; but we maintained our position till the carriage, after travelling some distance, came to a standstill, and some one began to get down. Then,

fearing lest gratuitous conveyance might be objected to, we got off and stood aside to reconnoitre before showing ourselves.

It appeared that the reason of the halt was our having reached an inn at which some one in the diligence was going to alight. The house door stood wide open, which indicated, I suppose, that accommodation might be had within by any one who could manage to awake one of the inhabitants ; but otherwise there was no sign of readiness for guests ; the premises were totally unlighted ; there was no guardian—human or canine—to give notice of the arrival of either friend or foe, nor was there any bell or other means of summons.

The diligence having drawn up opposite to this primitive hotel, one of the passengers got out with a bag in his hand, and the *conducteur* descended from his perch bearing a lantern. Then they entered the house, and as they did so the lantern went out, and we heard them go stumbling and groping their way in the dark upstairs to the first floor. Here there was a fastened door, which prevented a further advance, and a considerable amount of knocking, kicking, and bawling ensued, till some inmate was at last aroused to come and see what was wanted. Up to this moment the *conducteur* had appeared to consider himself as to

some extent bound to look after the passenger whom his vehicle had conveyed there ; but the instant his ears had assured him of the fact of there being a living person in the inn, he evidently felt that *his* duty in the matter was at an end, and all responsibility for the traveller henceforth transferred to the landlord. No sooner, therefore, were the first sounds audible of some one stirring within than the *conducteur* left his charge to take care of himself, and came clattering downstairs and out into the road again, without troubling himself to wait for the inner door to be opened, in order to find out whether the new-comer could be accommodated, or whether, perhaps, the little hostelry might be already full—in which case the visitor would have had no option about passing the rest of the night in the street, unless he had preferred going on again in the diligence.

“ Not much like English ideas of travelling and arriving at a hotel, is it ? ” whispered Kitty to me, with much truth.

As soon as the *conducteur* returned to the road, we stepped up to him, and Kitty asked if he would kindly tell us the name of this place, and also what was the destination of the diligence, as we were strangers who had got lost, and did not know where we were. He looked at us with no little

surprise, and answered that our present situation was St. Marie Sicché, and that the diligence was on its way to Ajaccio.

This was a welcome piece of information. St. Marie Sicché was, it will be remembered, the village where we had slept on the first night of our driving-tour ; consequently we were not in an altogether strange district, and knew that we were within three or four hours of Ajaccio, where the best part of our luggage was left, and where we were more at home than in any other part of the island. There could be no doubt that the best thing for us to do was to get there and make ourselves comfortable at the hotel as soon as possible ; and then, when the telegraph offices should be open in the morning, we would find out where Mrs. Rollin was, and relieve her mind as to our safety. The only obstacle was that we had no money to pay for our conveyance to Ajaccio ; for the *pénitenciers* had carried off everything valuable that we possessed ; and, therefore, unless we could get credit, we must evidently be involved in a good deal of bother and delay before we should be able to leave our present situation, or do anything that we wanted to do.

In this difficulty Kitty appealed to the *conducteur*, telling him that as we had been robbed, we

were at that moment penniless ; and asking him whether he would take us in his diligence to Ajaccio, and let us pay for our places after arriving there. She also told him the name of the hotel where our baggage was left, and assured him that we should have no difficulty in having our respectability guaranteed there. The man hesitated, hummed and hawed, looked suspiciously at us—muddy and untidy as we were—and did not seem much inclined to believe her story. But after some trouble, she persuaded him to consent to her request by promising to pay double the ordinary fare.

Having thus settled the matter satisfactorily with him, we anticipated no further difficulty, and were about to enter the interior of the vehicle—both *coupé* and *banquette* being full—when we were unexpectedly opposed by one of the passengers already established there. The conversation had roused him from his slumbers ; and when Kitty attempted to get in, he started forward and protested energetically against our admission. It was a shame to take up any one else, he said, when he and his fellows were already “*pressés comme des anchois*”; they had been crowded to the very verge of possibility by the person who had just alighted ; it was absurd to think of cramming us two indi-

viduals into the space that that one had occupied ; he objected—he would complain to the authorities—it was disgraceful to treat travellers in that way. Another diligence was due in about ten or twelve hours, and we ought to wait, and take our chance of finding places in that.

The prospect of waiting at St. Marie Sicché for another ten or twelve hours was by no means to our mind, and we were alarmed to see that the *conducteur* seemed inclined to listen to the irate passenger. But Kitty showed herself equal to the emergency. Turning promptly to the *conducteur*, she whispered to him that she hardly supposed he was going to leave us for the benefit of any rival vehicle ; and that as it was important to her to get to Ajaccio at once, she would give him treble the proper fare if he took us, instead of only double, as previously agreed. He was evidently quite alive to the fact that an extra high fare would give him the opportunity of pocketing a nice little profit, by only paying the diligence company a single fare and keeping the rest for himself ; and her increased offer put an end to his hesitation about introducing us into the already full conveyance. Therefore he turned a deaf ear to the other man's expostulations—thoroughly well-founded though they were—proceeded to make room somehow or other, and finally

stowed us away without heeding the discontented sleepy grunts and growls of the victims whom we had forced to compress themselves into an unnaturally small space. Then he shut us all in, climbed back to his place, and the journey was resumed.

The interior of a hot, crowded, stuffy diligence, packed closely with garlic-eating Corsicans clad in strong-smelling garments, would not generally be deemed a very inviting haven of repose. Yet it seemed so to us just then ; for we were tired enough to find rest anywhere delicious, and were too full of joy at having escaped from serious danger to grumble at such trifling annoyances as mere discomfort and unpleasant odours.

A couple of hours' jolting brought us to Cauro, where the horses were changed ; thence we continued our course to Ajaccio, which was reached soon after seven in the morning. Stiff and fatigued as we were, we should have been glad of a *fiacre* to take us from the *diligence-bureau* to the hotel ; but no *fiacre* was to be had at that early hour, so we set off walking, accompanied (I need hardly say) by an envoy sent by the *conducteur* to find out whether the account we had given of ourselves was a true one.

As we were going up the street I saw a couple

of smart-looking sailors coming towards us. The sight of them suddenly reminded me that there was a chance of Lord Clement's being still at Ajaccio, which possibility I had till then forgotten. If he were within reach, would Kitty turn willingly to him as a protector and counsellor, I wondered?

"Those two look like sailors from a yacht," said I; "if they should happen to belong to *La Catalina*, I suppose you will send word by them to Lord Clement that you have returned, won't you?"

"No! what would be the good of that?" she answered sharply, and not at all as if she was in any hurry to meet her noble admirer again. But second thoughts made her change her mind, for she added: "Well, yes; perhaps it would be as well to let him know we're back, if he *does* happen to be still here. Both you and I are dead tired; and he could go and see to telegraphing, and all that's got to be done, while we rest. Besides that, in spite of the principles of equality of these republicans, I strongly suspect that a person who is rich, a man, and an earl, stands a better chance of being attended to by the authorities than a mere commonplace woman. So, on the whole, I daresay he would be useful just now to act as agent for me."

When we were close to the sailors we saw that

they were part of the crew of *La Catalina*, as her name was visible upon their hats and jerseys.

"Is Lord Clement on board *La Catalina*?" asked Kitty.

The two tars stopped and stared in evident surprise at being accosted in their own tongue in the streets of Ajaccio at that early hour in the morning.

"Ay, ay," answered one of them.

"Just go back to the yacht at once then," returned Kitty, "and tell him that Miss Mervyn has returned here, and has gone to the hotel where she was staying before, and will be glad to see him there as soon as possible."

The men, who did not in the least recognise us, stared more than ever at hearing themselves ordered about in this fashion by one of two strange women presenting the extraordinary appearance which Kitty and I did at that moment. For it must be remembered that we had been splashed with mud from head to foot as we sat on the step of the diligence; that our clothes were torn, rumpled, and put on anyhow; that our hair was horribly dishevelled; and that we were altogether as untidy-looking objects as could well be imagined.

Evidently the sailors did not know what to make of us, and were undecided, for a moment, whether to do what they were told, or to be im-

pertinent. But Kitty bore the stamp of high birth and breeding marked too plainly for it to be concealed by disreputable externals ; and she spoke with the calmly-commanding manner of a person who is accustomed to be obeyed. The sailors were not insensible to this influence, and could not help recognising her as a legitimate authority, notwithstanding the peculiarity of her appearance. When, therefore, she repeated what she had said before, and again told them to be off at once, they looked at one another sheepishly, touched their hats, and departed obediently in the direction of the harbour. And that they executed their commission faithfully was proved by the promptitude with which Lord Clement arrived at our hotel and asked for Miss Mervyn.

Poor young man ! thought I, as I watched him going upstairs to her room. I do not suppose you will be very pleased at what you are going to hear ; for your Mrs. Grundy-loving nature is sure to abhor eccentric adventures ; and I do not expect you will enjoy that your lady-love should be known to have been the heroine of such an unusual experience as Kitty has just gone through ! Judging by the annoyed and disturbed expression on his countenance when the interview with her was over, and he left the hotel, I imagine that my anticipations

were not far wrong, and that his sense of propriety and of the fitness of things was greatly shocked at what had occurred to the young lady whom he desired to marry. His annoyance, however, did not prevent him from taking all trouble off her shoulders as far as possible ; and he made himself useful by telegraphing to various places till he had discovered Mrs. Rollin ; then informing her that we were safe at Ajaccio ; and also giving notice to the police of the nefarious proceedings of César and Napoleon.

Our loss had thrown Mrs. Rollin into a state of anxiety, nervousness, and discomposure, which none of the French novels she had with her had sufficed to calm. She had gone on hourly exciting herself more and more against Corsica and all its people, until she had worked herself into an unreasoning aversion to it and them. Consequently, when she rejoined us at Ajaccio, which she did on the evening of the day that we had returned there, the one fixed idea in her mind was, that she would never know a moment's ease or happiness as long as she remained in the island, and that we must get away from it immediately.

On hearing our adventures she declared that what had happened was fearful, ghastly, and shocking, but yet no more than was to be expected in

an out-of-the-way, uncivilised, poverty-stricken country where nobody went, where the inhabitants lived without milk and butter, and where every one was a savage or thief, or both. She very deeply regretted having let herself be over-persuaded to come to this Corsica ; but, at all events, no power on earth should induce her to stay in such a vile, odious, unsafe, abominable place any longer. Besides, though the two *penitenciers* would probably never be captured, yet still, supposing by any accident that they *were* caught, and Kitty was within reach, then the girl would be wanted to give evidence against them, and that was another reason for taking flight at once. Else there would be the risk of Kitty's having to appear in a police-court, take oaths, be cross-examined and badgered by vulgar lawyers, and all that sort of thing, which was quite unfit for a lady to undergo. And what depths the vulgarity of lawyers in a republican country might reach, she, Mrs. Rollin, was afraid to think ! Of course she by no means expected that the robbers *would* be taken ; but as there was a possibility of such a thing, it was her duty to provide for it.

When she stopped to take breath, Kitty inquired why she was so certain that the culprits would not be recaptured, and that set her off

again. She had seen, she said, enough of Corsicans by this time to convince her that they were all rogues alike, and all in collusion with one another. In hopes of keeping us staying on and on, and spending money amongst them, they might perhaps talk big, and declare that the offenders would soon be under lock and key ; but meanwhile they would be let to escape quietly ; or, if caught, good care would be taken that they should not be convicted. But *she* wasn't going to be so silly as to be made a fool of by these Corsicans, and to play into their hands by remaining there longer. No, thank you ! She had discovered that there would be a steamer to Marseilles on the following day, and by that steamer she intended to go. And besides everything else, there was yet another reason, she averred, why she must now begin to make her way homewards. She found, from letters she had just received, that matters of business made it necessary for her to return to England sooner than she had expected. She must positively have a week's shopping in Paris on the way back, and she would not have time for this unless she started at once. Therefore it was, in every respect, out of the question that we should prolong our visit to this detestable island.

Her mind was made up too firmly to be shaken,

and on the next day we quitted Ajaccio in *La Catalina*—Lord Clement having again placed that vessel at my two ladies' disposal. I am afraid, however, that this act of civility did not bring him the satisfaction that he probably expected. For Kitty, instead of making herself agreeable during the voyage, professed to be headachy, and remained alone in a cabin; and as soon as Marseilles was reached, she and her aunt said good-bye to him, and set off for Paris by the next *rapide*. Very possibly he would have liked to accompany them there. But then yachting was his ostensible occupation at the present time; and if he deserted his yacht to go to Paris, people would be sure to talk, shrug shoulders, and say that there certainly was something on between him and Kitty. Though all this would not matter supposing it to be followed promptly by the announcement that they were engaged, yet, under other circumstances, it would in his eyes be highly undesirable; therefore he stuck to *La Catalina*.

As for me, I was a good deal disappointed, for I had been looking forward with vindictive pleasure to the chance of bearing witness against Messrs. César and Napoleon, and I grudged the hasty departure from Corsica which deprived me of this

chance. A few days later I saw in a newspaper that they had been caught, and relegated to their former quarters in prison at Chiavari. That was some comfort, no doubt ; but nothing like as satisfactory as it would have been to have contributed, in my own person, to bring about their punishment.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTAIN NORROY APPEARS.

I HAVE already said that the circumstances connected with the photograph which I had found in Kitty's purse had made me fancy that there was some secret reason for her regarding Captain Edward Norroy differently from the rest of mankind ; and I have said, also, that I was hoping some day to see him and her together, on chance that I might then succeed in discovering a clue to a right comprehension of what the relations between them were. This opportunity which I desired came unexpectedly on the day after our arrival in Paris, and was brought about in the following manner.

Mrs. Rollin was determined that she and Kitty must be photographed by a Paris photographer named Raoul, who was at that time so much the rage amongst fashionable people that to be in his town and not profit by the opportunity of having her likeness done by him, would have been a sin

of omission which would have lain heavy on her conscience for the rest of her existence—or, at all events, for as long as he continued to be the fashion. It was, of course, necessary in the first place to ascertain when it would suit the great man to take the photograph. For this purpose she had intended to go to his studio in person on the day after reaching Paris ; but as she happened to be a little out of sorts on that day, she preferred to stay at home reading *Rocambole*, and send Kitty in her stead, under my escort, to make the requisite appointment. At the studio we found a polite assistant, who was quite in despair to think that the ladies should be obliged to wait ; but as his *patron* was just then engaged, he feared it was inevitable that they should do so, unless their business was of a nature which he, the assistant, could transact for them. If so, he should be proud and honoured to receive their commands.

Now Mrs. Rollin, having been much exercised in her mind as to whether it would be more *chic* to be done in morning or evening attire, had particularly instructed Kitty to refer the matter to Raoul, and find out his opinion about it. Consequently she declined the assistant's offer of his services with thanks, and said that she would wait till Monsieur Raoul was disengaged. On this

we were shown into the waiting-room, which was as dreary as the rest of its kind, and where we endeavoured to find amusement by inspecting the various specimens of the *patron's* art that were dispersed on the table.

We were thus employed, and I was standing with my back to the door, when it opened to admit some one ; at the same instant I saw Kitty—who was looking that way—flush violently and suddenly, and, on turning round, I perceived that the new-comer was Captain Norroy.

I need hardly say that I was immediately all eyes and ears for what would take place ; and that my subsequent inspection of photographs was a mere pretence, which I kept up in order that the young couple might not suspect how attentively I was studying them.

They shook hands, exchanged greetings, and then went on to talk of the weather, the state of the streets, the hotels at which they were staying, etc., just as any ordinary acquaintances would do. There was not the faintest trace of consciousness about Captain Norroy's manner ; and he was so evidently free from any kind of special emotion connected with Kitty, that I doubted, for a moment, whether my surmises might after all have been wrong. But then, again, I felt confirmed in them

by Kitty, who was certainly not as cool and unembarrassed as was the captain. The first flush caused by his entrance had nearly died out; but there still lingered a tinge of unwonted colour on her cheeks, and a more than commonly brilliant light in her eyes. In both her look and manner of speaking I could detect a shade of nervousness, of pleasure, of restraint, of something different to usual, which I was unable to interpret. It was a difference so slight as to have been, probably, imperceptible to any one who did not know her well; but to me it was so plainly visible that I felt sure I was not mistaken about it.

As it happened, the conversation presently took a turn which supplied me with such a clue as I wanted, in order to read the riddle which had been perplexing me, and to arrive at some idea of how matters stood between these two people, in whom my interest had been excited.

The captain, looking at his watch, observed that Raoul was not very punctual, as it was already twenty minutes past the time when he had said that he would be ready to photograph the captain.

“What! are you actually going to be photographed?” said Kitty, laughing. “I can hardly believe it possible when I remember the vehemence with which I have heard you declare that, having

gone through the operation once, you never would again. You professed to think it an intolerable bore."

"Yes—so I did, and so I do still," he replied; "but I'm going to sacrifice myself nobly for the sake of other people. You see almost every one, now-a-days, has a *carte-de-visite* book, which they are desirous of filling by hook or by crook. Consequently, one is constantly being entreated for a photo by even one's most casual acquaintances. One don't like to be always refusing to do what one's asked, because it makes one feel such an ill-natured brute; but at present I can't help saying no when I'm asked for a photo of myself, for the very excellent reason that I haven't such a thing to give."

"Why not?" inquired Kitty. "Haven't you the photos which were taken on the solitary occasion when you *were* done?"

"Ah! that attempt had no *chance*, as the French say," he answered. "My batch of copies fell into the fire directly they arrived, and were all burnt except four, which I managed to rescue, and of which I gave three to my mother and sisters, and the fourth to Lady Cantern, who was just then perfectly ravenous for photos, because she and her sister were in the midst of a race as to which could

get her photo-book filled the quickest. Of course this left me destitute of *cartes*, so I at once ordered a fresh lot from the photographer; but the fates were evidently against me, for the original plate had been accidentally cracked, so that no more copies could be struck from it. Curiously enough, too, the bad luck which attended that photographic effort pursued even the copy I gave Lady Cantern. You remember that time you and I, and a lot of other people, were staying with her last winter for balls, don't you? What a pleasant visit it was! and especially that last *cotillion* you and I danced together—wasn't it delightful?"

As Kitty assented, I noticed that she looked down somewhat nervously, as if she wished to avoid all risk of having the recollections evoked by the mention of that visit read in her face.

"Well," he continued, "she says that she missed my photo out of her book on the very day after her guests departed; and as she is positive it was in its place just before, she declares some one of them must have taken a fancy to it and carried it off. At first she accused *me* of being the thief—as if it was likely I should care to have such a caricature of myself as I considered it to be! I can't imagine how she *could* suppose that any one would wish for such an unflattering presentment

of himself as long as looking-glasses continue plentiful! However, I undeceived her on that point ; and then she said that if it wasn't I who had appropriated the thing, it must have been some one else. My own idea is that she must have put it away somewhere, and forgotten what she'd done with it. But, anyhow, she hadn't discovered it when last I saw her, and I don't believe she will—that batch had no *chance*, as I said before. Ah! here comes Raoul to lead off his victim. I shall have a few moments of grace whilst you and he fix the date of your execution ; and then——”

Raoul's entrance terminated this conversation, to which I—whilst making believe to be engrossed in the study of photographs—had listened with the greatest attention. It seemed to me to throw fresh light upon the matter that had been perplexing me hitherto.

Evidently Kitty possessed a photograph of Captain Norroy of which there were only four copies in existence. As neither of them had been given to her, she must have come by it surreptitiously ; and her possession of it was, no doubt, to be explained by the mysterious disappearance of Lady Cantern's copy immediately after Kitty had been staying in her house.

But though I thought there could be no doubt as to Kitty's having been the person who purloined this precious *carte-de-visite*, I was sorely puzzled to conjecture what possible motive she could have had for doing so. After reflecting deeply on the problem, I could find no solution of it except one, which did not seem to me to be altogether likely. It was this. Had the handsome young captain perhaps touched her heart more deeply than was expedient? and could she have fallen in love with him? If so, that might explain the things that now puzzled me: her stealing the photograph; the care with which it was concealed; the emotion she had betrayed when I suddenly produced it; and also the nervousness and peculiarity of manner I had noticed in her when she met him at Raoul's.

But however probable this theory might have appeared in the case of some girls, it hardly seemed admissible when Kitty was the person concerned. For as it was quite plain that the captain's sentiments towards her were simply those of an ordinary acquaintance, it followed that to suppose her to have a fancy for him involved supposing that she cared for a man who did not return the compliment. And her pride seemed to make such an idea impossible. Kitty Mervyn to have an unre-

quited attachment, indeed ! It was absurd even to think of such a thing.

Yet again, on the other hand, who could tell what caprice might not rule an article so notoriously wayward as a woman's heart ? And if love overcomes bolts and bars, why should it not conquer the stiffest pride also ? Clearly it was foolish of me to think I could be *sure* of how any person would act, when there was a possibility of a strange and unknown quantity like love manifesting itself, upsetting the best-founded calculations, and altering the whole aspect of affairs.

Still, I could scarcely bring myself to believe that Kitty would have bestowed her affections on any one who did not seek them. Ah ! but then there was the question—had she perhaps imagined that they *were* sought ? This good-looking Captain Norroy was as pleasant in manner as he was in personal appearance ; his voice was soft and caressing ; he gave me the idea of being a lazy, good-humoured, susceptible man, who would enjoy popularity with women and take pains to be agreeable in their eyes ; and who would unintentionally put an appearance of earnestness into a mere passing flirtation, which would make it dangerous to the other party. And possibly he had admired Kitty, and flirted with her mildly, without meaning

anything serious ; and possibly she had been deceived by his attentions into supposing he was in love with her, and not discovered her error until her heart was already touched.

If that were so, I could not help pitying her ; for I knew that the knowledge of her own weakness and folly must be terribly galling to her, and that she must be in a continual state of anxiety lest any one should discover, or even suspect it. Yet I could imagine, too, that the bitterness would be mingled with sweetness, in that she would be always hoping he might some day return her love. It was a hope that it would be most natural for her to entertain ; for she could not fail to know how generally attractive she was to his sex ; and as he was but a man like other men, was it not reasonable to suppose that he too might be affected by charms which his fellows seemed to find irresistible ? And then the recollection of the numerous admirers she had had, and for whom she cared nothing, took my thoughts for a moment into a fresh channel, as I wondered whether those victims would not have thought it a no more than just retribution for her to give her affections without return. For I was aware that some ill-natured people had been known to term her a regular flirt ; and I had heard of rejected suitors of hers who

had complained bitterly of the impartial amiability with which she behaved to every one, and had declared that she did it with malicious intent to lead men on to propose, in order that she might have the pleasure of refusing them.

Assuming her to be in love with Captain Norroy, I thought I could form a pretty good guess as to what her feeling about Lord Clement would be. Her pride would be all in his favour; for pride would be up in arms at the idea of her waiting to see if the captain would condescend to throw his handkerchief to her, and would urge her to terminate so humiliating a situation by marrying some one else. And thus pride would be a powerful auxiliary to the soaring ambition and desire to be amongst the great ones of the earth, which were marked features of her character. All this would evidently prompt her to accept Lord Clement and the high rank and position he had to offer; and I could only account for her not having done so already, by supposing that the voice of natural inclination had made itself heard on the other side. Perhaps it had pleaded with her not to be in a hurry, and not rashly to render impossible a happiness that might still be hers if she would have the patience to wait a while longer. Perhaps the struggle between pride and love was going on

within her now, and she had not yet determined which voice to listen to. If so, I could by no means hazard an opinion as to what the issue was likely to be ; and it seemed to me an even chance which would gain the mastery.

How far were all these speculations and conjectures of mine right ? That remained to be proved ; and I felt as if fate had kindly assigned to me a good situation in the front row whence to watch the progress of a play which it amused me to look on at. Yet, as it must interfere with one's enjoyment of a play to get excited about its termination, I should certainly have preferred for some other than Kitty to be the chief performer. For I was half afraid that I might find I cared for her too much to remain an altogether indifferent spectator where her happiness was seriously concerned.

CHAPTER V.

A NEWSPAPER PARAGRAPH.

OF course Mrs. Rollin and Kitty had a deal of shopping to do in Paris ; for to be in that town and not buy clothes is—to most feminine minds—an unpardonable sinning of one's mercies. The dressmaker whom they elected to give their orders to was a certain Madame Jarrot, much patronised by the fashionable world ; and having made an appointment with her at her own residence, they proceeded thither to keep it one day soon after the visit to the photographer which was related in the last chapter.

Now I liked much better to sit in their drawing-room than in the poky little garret which was my bedroom ; and when they did not want the sitting-room themselves, I never saw any reason why I should not avail myself of it. No sooner, therefore, were they safe off than I betook myself there, and proceeded to make myself comfortable, according to my usual practice, during their absence. Lying

on the table were some English newspapers that had just arrived, and I began to read them. In a column devoted to fashionable intelligence, I presently came upon the following paragraph—to me most entirely unexpected.

“The Duke of Murkshire and his family, who are at present in the French metropolis, will probably return at an early date to their ancestral halls, in order to make preparations for the marriage of his Grace’s eldest daughter, Lady Emma, to Captain Edward Norroy of the Scots Fusilier Guards. The engagement of the young couple has just been announced, and the wedding is, we understand, to take place shortly.”

When I had read this I laid down the paper, feeling perfectly dazed. Captain Norroy going to be married to this Lady Emma! In my speculations about Kitty and her love affairs I had—without being aware of it—invariably put aside as absurd the idea of its being possible that any one whom she might honour with her preference *could* remain indifferent to her; and therefore I had all along been unconsciously taking it for granted that Captain Norroy must inevitably fall in love with her sooner or later; and that if she did not eventually become his wife, it would not be at any rate for want of the opportunity. I knew

well enough that I myself should have been at her feet if she had but held up her little finger to me. And as one is apt to consider it a matter of course that attractions by which one is oneself fascinated must be equally irresistible to other people, it was consequently not much to be wondered at that I should now be utterly taken aback at finding the man whom I believed her to care for was going to marry some one else.

The thing seemed to me hardly credible. He must be blind—a dolt and fool—to have a prize like Kitty within his reach, and let it slip! Why, there was no one so attractive and charming as she was; she was (in my eyes) quite incomparable. And though I had never seen this Lady Emma, and knew nothing whatever about her, I was none the less firmly convinced that she could not hold a candle to Kitty in any single respect.

How would Kitty take the news, I wondered? Had she any expectation of it? Had the possibility of such a thing ever occurred to her? No; I had an intuitive conviction to the contrary. When she had met him at Raoul's her manner had shown not only shyness and nervousness, there had been something more—something indefinable, of pleasure and hope—which made me feel sure that she had believed him to be heart-whole, and

not the property of any other girl, or about to become so. Had she been in England, she would no doubt have heard some of the gossip by which the engagements of people conspicuous in society are usually preceded; but her recent absence abroad had, of course, prevented any rumours of a flirtation between Captain Norroy and Lady Emma from reaching her ears; and she must now be totally unprepared to hear they were going to be married. Of course, it would not matter to her an atom if she were fancy-free about him, and if the romance I had constructed was a baseless one. But then I was almost positive that it was *not* baseless, and that the news would be a blow to her, though she would doubtless strain every nerve to conceal that fact.

My poor Kitty, thought I sorrowfully; and, immediately afterwards, laughed at my own folly. How could I be so silly as to prefix the possessive pronoun singular to the name of a person who was not mine at all? Though she had always been kind and courteous to me, yet her manner showed plainly that she regarded me as one of an inferior order, between whom and herself existed, naturally, an impassable barrier; and knowing this, why should I concern myself about her troubles, as if she and I had been on terms of equality and

intimate friendship? It would be ridiculous to do anything of the kind. Had I not resolved before now that I would put a check upon the inclination to be fascinated by her, of which I was conscious? Certainly I had; and yet how was I keeping that resolution if I let myself take her affairs to heart, and feel sorry for her, and indignant with Captain Norroy, as I was inclined to be at that moment? Provoked to see in myself such a disposition to be weakly sentimental, I was glad when my common-sense and turn for ridicule be-stirred themselves, and applied mentally a douche of cold water which cooled down my first absurd impulse to be her ardent partisan.

After all, her affairs were no business of mine, and it was mere folly to let myself be vexed about them in any way. It could do no possible good, and I should be simply making myself uncomfortable for nothing. Besides, if she could see into my mind, I might be very sure that she would not approve of her maid's presuming to take so much interest in her affairs, and would consider me impertinent and officious.

Sensible reflections of this kind effectually repressed my previous tendency to a foolish soft-heartedness; and I resumed my interrupted perusal of the newspaper, and amused myself placidly

during the rest of the afternoon till nearly dinner-time, when my mistresses returned.

I went to dress Kitty, wondering whether or not she had yet heard of Captain Norroy's engagement. Anyhow, if she had, it had not troubled her at all, for she was evidently in excellent spirits; and in that respect presented a marked contrast to her aunt, who came into her room during toilette operations, and who—as it was easy to see—had something on her mind which disturbed her. At first, I took it into my head, from this uneasiness, that Mrs. Rollin must have some suspicion of her niece's being attached to Captain Norroy, and that, having heard of his engagement to Lady Emma, she must now be worrying herself as to how Kitty would take the news, and as to the unhappiness the girl might suffer on account of it. But, from what was said, I speedily discovered that Mrs. Rollin's disquietude arose from a very different cause—neither more nor less than a pair of stays.

"Do you know, Kitty," she said, "that I've been thinking, ever since we left Jarrot's, of your flat refusal to have anything to do with that pair of stays she wanted you to wear. I cannot feel satisfied that you decided wisely. It's still not too late to change your mind, you know. Are you *sure* you won't give them a trial, and see how you like them?"

Kitty laughed as if the scene at the dressmaker's was an amusing one to recollect.

"Yes, I'm quite positive I won't," she answered; "they were at least three inches too small for me, and I really *couldn't* consent to such a wholesale diminution of the circumference of my waist! I suppose you are moved to plead for them by the recollection of Jarrot's horror and distress when she found my objection to them was quite invincible. Really I don't wonder. Her look of shocked and surprised grief would have been pathetic if the cause hadn't made it comic; and I was quite sorry to have to wound her feelings so deeply."

"Oh no, my dear, of course, it isn't *that*," returned Mrs. Rollin, somewhat pettishly; "what have I got to do with a dressmaker's feelings? But what I was thinking of was, her declaring that small waists are becoming so much the rage as to be almost indispensable; and that no lady who cares to be *bien mise* ever *thinks* of objecting to have her waist reduced to the smallest size possible. Jarrot is safe to be a good authority on the subject, because she is employed by quite the *crème de la crème* of society. I am afraid you think only of what you like; and forget that people who don't do the same as their fellows are sure to be rash, even if not wrong."

"Only, then, one must draw a line somewhere," replied Kitty; "and I draw it at having my internal arrangements shoved out of their places. Not even to possess a small waist will I endure that! Jarrot regarded it as a mere temporary inconvenience, to which I should soon get reconciled, because she thought that what is comfortable is simply whatever one was used to. But there I don't agree with her. It amused me to see how confidently she quoted *il faut souffrir pour être belle*, as if that must certainly settle the question. Somehow or other, even that argument failed to persuade me to make myself ill, though I am not a whit more deficient in vanity and care for my personal appearance than the rest of my sex."

Mrs. Rollin sighed. "If you won't, you won't, of course," she said; "still I should have thought you might have made the attempt to do as others do, just for a little bit, as she wanted you to."

"You see I'm too fond of my precious comfort," answered Kitty, merrily; "and, do you know, aunty, I've a great idea that I'm not the only person in the family with that weakness; and that you, too, sometimes like to go your own way, even if it isn't exactly the cut-and-dried path followed by every one else."

"Kitty, Kitty, you shouldn't say things like

that," expostulated her aunt ; "you know that I consider being different from other people to be a proof of an ill-regulated mind ; and that, therefore, to accuse me of eccentric tastes is equivalent to saying I deserve blame. Please remember that I *strongly* object to your speaking in such a most inconsiderate manner."

"All right, aunt," said Kitty, good humouredly ; "I'm sorry I vexed you—I'll be more careful another time. I didn't for a moment mean to imply that you aren't all you should be, you know."

But though she said this, I don't think it followed that she believed Mrs. Rollin's mind to be always in absolute conformity with its own standard of perfection. Anyhow, there was a twinkle in Kitty's eye, which made me doubtful on the subject.

Their toilettes being now completed, they descended to dinner, leaving me quite satisfied that Kitty had no secret grief oppressing her. It must be one of two things, then, I thought, as I watched her going downstairs : either my theory is wrong from beginning to end, or else she as yet knows nothing of this approaching marriage. However, it is very likely that she may not have had time to look at the papers yet, as they had only just come before she went out.

When next I saw her it was very different ; and I no longer doubted that I had been right in thinking she cared for Captain Norroy. About an hour after dinner was over I was in her room arranging some clothes, when the door opened, and she entered. Her head was drooping, instead of being carried proudly thrown back as usual ; her face was deadly pale, and wore an expression of misery. On seeing her like this, I felt sure that she must have just read the paragraph concerning him, and had rushed off to be alone, so that she might be relieved from the irksome restraint imposed by the presence of other people, and might let her features relax for a while into whatever expression of pain came natural to them.

In taking refuge in her own room she had evidently forgotten the possibility of any one being there ; for as soon as she saw me she started violently, and seemed to strive to replace the mask, and look the same as usual for a few moments longer.

" You can leave those things for the present, Jill," she said, controlling her voice with an effort ; " I have come to lie down, as I have rather a bad headache."

I saw she longed to have me gone, and as I

did not want to add to her troubles, I prepared to take myself off as quickly as possible. But I was bound to play my part of lady's-maid ; and as I knew that it would be an unheard-of solecism for such an official not to profess sympathy—whether she really felt it or not—with her mistress' ailments, I was obliged to pause a moment before departing, that I might express concern for her headache, and ask if I should bring her a cup of tea or coffee, or if there was anything else I could do for her. My offer, however, was not accepted.

"All I want is to be left quiet," she said, rather impatiently ; "if I want you I will ring."

I withdrew accordingly. She stayed in her room by herself during the remainder of the evening, saying that her headache was still bad. At bedtime she summoned me to assist her as usual, and I thought she looked perfectly wretched. She meant, however, to keep up appearances, for when her aunt came in to inquire how she was, and say good night, she exerted herself to seem as lively as usual. She declared that her headache was all the fault of those stays Jarrot had wanted her to have. The mere idea of such an enormity of tininess had so shocked her nerves, liver, lungs, brain, and organs in general, that they had felt bound to make some forcible demonstration of

disgust; and the demonstration had taken the shape of a headache. A night's rest would put her all right, she said, if she did not dream about those horrid stays ; but if she were to have a nightmare about wearing them, she really could not say *what* might be the consequences to her health. This nonsense was uttered with enough of her customary vivacity to deceive Mrs. Rollin, who went away, quite satisfied that there was nothing the matter except an ordinary headache. But *I* thought differently. I had seen Kitty's lips quivering while she spoke, and had seen unmistakable traces of tears in her eyes ; I had felt that her head was burning hot, and the rest of her body like ice ; and these things made me believe that there was something more amiss with her than a mere commonplace headache.

When I had performed my duties for the night, and gone to my own room, my heart *would* keep aching for her, in spite of my efforts to restore it to its habitual condition of sensible hardness. Our recent adventures in Corsica had taught me that she would face death and danger unflinchingly ; and I knew her to be exceptionally proud, strong, and brave. Yet for all her strength, courage, and pride, she seemed to be almost broken down to-night. And it naturally moves one more to see

such a person as that give way than to witness the upsetting of a weaker mortal.

Anxiety about her, as I pictured to myself her solitary suffering, and longed to be able to comfort her, kept me awake and restless. What if she were to have a brain fever, or a nervous fever, or some other kind of illness such as I had heard of being brought on by a sudden mental shock? Perhaps at that very moment she was ill, and in need of assistance. So uneasy did I become, that at last I could stay away from her no longer, but determined to relieve my mind by going at once to assure myself of her well-being.

I got up accordingly, put on a dressing-gown, and stole quietly to the door of her room, where I stood listening for a minute, and wondering whether she had had the good fortune to fall asleep. No; for I heard a deep sigh, followed by an inarticulate, moaning sound, which—though so low as to be hardly audible—had something about it that seemed to me unutterably sad and forlorn. An incontrollable impulse seized me to go to her and try if I could not find some way of being of use or comfort to her. But I could not enter the room unless she choose to admit me, for she always kept her door locked at night when in a hotel. I knocked gently, and she responded, "*Qui est-ce?*"

"It is Jill," I replied; "may I come in? I came to see if your head is still bad? and if so, if I shall bathe it with eau de cologne, or fetch you anything, or try and read you to sleep, or do anything else for you?"

"Oh no, thanks," she answered in a weary voice; "pray go to bed and leave me, for I am better to be quite alone. You know if I want anything I can ring."

Was the reminder of the bell intended as a gentle hint that it was officious to disturb her with an offer of services which she could command if she required them? That was the light in which I regarded it, at all events; and I left her door, feeling that I had been a fool for my pains, and richly deserved the snub I had received. I asked myself scornfully what had made me try to obtain admittance into the room? what good it could have been? and what I supposed I should have done had she opened the door to me? Should I have flung my arms around her, and told her that I knew all, and was come to comfort her, or behaved in some similarly gushing manner? Most certainly not! I knew better than to imagine that an absurd demonstration of that kind would gratify her from any one, and, least of all, from a servant. Besides, when she was doing all she could to keep her

trouble and its cause a profound secret, it would hardly have been a happy method of consolation to go and inform her that her efforts had failed, and that her secret was no secret at all. What, then, *should* I have done? I had not the remotest notion, and was forced to confess that my impulse to be with her had been simply a piece of sentimental, impractical folly, which it was very lucky I had not been able to indulge. I could not possibly have done anything to help her, and it would clearly have been wiser and kinder of me to have left her in peace; and, laughing at myself bitterly, and feeling decidedly small and ridiculous in my own eyes, I retired to bed.

CHAPTER VI.

NOTICE TO QUIT.

My fears lest Kitty's health might be affected by what had happened proved unfounded. By next morning she had got herself once more in hand, and I did not again see the expression of utter abandonment to misery which had been visible on her face the previous night at the moment when she entered her room, and before she was aware of my presence there. If ever she allowed herself to look like that again, I expect it was not until she had made quite sure first that there was no human being within reach to see what her countenance might betray.

Some change in her, however, it was impossible that there should not be, after the great and sudden mental commotion which she had experienced. I observed that she was paler than her wont, and had black marks under her eyes, which, when commented on by her aunt, she accounted for as being the results of her violent headache. I saw, too,

that when she was not laughing or talking, and her features were in repose, they settled into a hard stern expression which they had not worn before ; and that there was in her eyes a new look of haughty defiance, as though they were challenging the whole world to penetrate one hair's-breadth further than she chose into the locked casket of her inner self. In other respects she was outwardly unaltered, and went about and conducted herself in much the same way as usual. The first shock of the blow had made her stagger for an instant, but she had never broken down altogether, and was now prepared to stand firm, and give no sign of pain. Natures like hers, endowed with strength, pluck, and indomitable pride, are generally more likely to be embittered than crushed when trouble and disappointment comes upon them.

Just at this period my studies of Kitty's character were cut short abruptly, and my own concerns forced themselves unpleasantly into the foreground, and demanded exclusive attention.

Whilst I had been abroad my mind had been fully occupied with the various incidents of our travels, and I had forgotten all about my quondam-admirer Perkins, Lord Mervyn's valet. Unluckily, however, he had not been equally oblivious of me; for, in rejecting his attentions and causing the loss

of his cherished whiskers, I had inflicted an injury that he could neither forgive nor forget, and for which he had vowed vengeance. When, therefore, chance unkindly enabled him to discover an opportunity for doing me a bad turn, he lost no time in profiting by it; and the effect which his malice had upon my fortunes I was now to experience.

The day before we were to leave Paris and return to England, I was up in my room, beginning to pack my box, when a housemaid came to tell me to go to Kitty, who was in her bedroom, and wished to see me. I obeyed the summons immediately, without a suspicion of impending trouble; but my tranquillity vanished as soon as I reached her room, and caught sight of her face. She was sitting by the writing-table, and looked up at me, on my entrance, with an air of cold dignified displeasure, which showed me plainly there was something wrong, and that I was in her black books for some cause or other. What the dickens is the matter? I thought. I began hastily considering what recent actions of mine to which she was likely to object could have come to her ears; but I could not recollect any misdemeanour important enough to make her look so displeased. I wished I could guess what sort of accusation was going

to be brought against me, so that I might know whether to prepare denial, excuse, or frank confession. For which of these three would be the best defence for me to offer must obviously depend upon what likelihood there was that the real truth would be ascertained.

"I have to speak to you, Jill," she said, "about a most disagreeable matter. A letter which I have just received from my mother tells me that she has seen Sir Bartholomew Brown, who has lately returned to London, and that when she questioned him about you he denied all knowledge of any one of your name, or answering to your description ; declared that no such person had ever been in his service ; and that the character, purporting to have been written by him, which you produced in applying for our situation, was a forgery. What have you to say to this ?"

That was just what I did not know myself ; for I was completely dumbfounded by this sudden attack from a quarter where I had anticipated no danger. Why on earth could not Sir Bartholomew have stayed in the East, as he had been supposed to be going to do ? In vain did I rack my brains for some way of extricating myself from this dilemma. Not a single idea would occur to me, so I simply remained silent—a course which had,

at all events, the recommendation of not committing me one way or other.

Kitty waited for a little while ; and then, perceiving that I did not intend to answer, she said :

“ Am I to understand by your silence that you are unable to contradict the truth of what Sir Bartholomew said ? ”

“ Oh, if you *choose* to understand it so, m’m, of course I can’t help that,” replied I, shrugging my shoulders, and still evading a direct admission of the charge which it was evidently useless for me to dispute.

“ I do not choose it at all,” she returned quickly ; “ on the contrary, I should greatly prefer to find that you are able to clear yourself. But I wish to have a definite answer from you, either yes or no, when I ask—Is the thing true ? ”

I hesitated for a moment. Then, seeing that I could gain nothing by denying, and that to tell a lie about it would only sink me yet lower in her eyes without doing me the least good, I replied desperately, “ Well—yes.”

For a few minutes she did not speak, and sat with her head resting on her hand, and apparently reflecting about something. At last she said :

“ I have been considering what to do. My mother thinks that you should at once be given in charge

of the police ; but that I do not feel inclined to do, after what we went through together in Corsica the other day, and the way in which you behaved then. Besides, I have had no cause of complaint since you have been with me, and I think you have served *me* well—whatever you may have done elsewhere. Therefore, though of course I dismiss you, yet I wish to treat you with no needless harshness. I propose, then, that you should continue to be my maid for a day longer, so as not to leave me till we arrive in London. Thus you will not be turned adrift in a foreign country, as would be the case if I discharged you here, on the spot; you will also have been brought back to whence you came, and be left in no worse position than you were before entering our service. As for your wages, I shall, of course, pay them to you fully. If you like this arrangement—which is, I think, as favourable a one as you can expect—I am quite willing to make it. I daresay some people would say I ought not to let you stay an hour longer in my service ; and that all the thanks I shall get is to be laughed at, and perhaps robbed, by a person who has already shown herself to be a forger. But I would rather take my chance of that than have to reproach myself with having wronged you.”

I did not like her to think worse of me than I deserved, and for a moment I felt very much inclined to tell her who I was, in order that she might see that circumstances had really *compelled* me to act as I had done. For if I had not forged a character to start with, how could I ever have obtained a chance of earning one honestly? I think I should inevitably have yielded to the inclination, and imparted my history to her there and then, if there had been anything in her manner to make me believe that I had won a footing, however low down, in her affection—that she cared about me just one little bit. But there was no such indication. She would not defraud me of one atom that might be due for the services I had rendered, because it would have wounded her own self-respect to do that. But I saw (or imagined myself to see) that the consideration she showed for me was dictated solely by a sense of justice, and not by any softer feeling; and the rising impulse to confide in her was frozen back by the cold, haughty severity of her demeanour towards one whom she regarded as a mere common cheat and forger. Consequently I only replied stiffly that I was much obliged for her offer, which I should be glad to accept; and that she might depend upon it I would not give her cause to repent of her kindness.

"Very well," she returned ; "then we will consider the matter settled so, and you will leave me when we get to Charing Cross. By the by, I may as well let you know that I have not told my aunt of what I heard to-day, and that I shall not do so till after you have left. It would only fuss her needlessly."

Then I withdrew, feeling extremely provoked at the turn affairs had taken, and heartily anathematising Sir Bartholomew for having come back to England so inopportunely, instead of staying in the East, as he had been expected to do. How unlucky, too, that Lady Mervyn should have happened to meet him, and to have had nothing better to talk about than *me* ! The more I thought about it, the more extraordinary did it seem that she should have ever troubled herself to mention me to him : for, from what I knew of her ladyship, I should have thought that a lady's-maid was far too insignificant to be honoured by being made a topic of her conversation with a stranger—that is to say, unless there had been some special reason for it ; and I did not think any such reason was likely to have existed in this instance. Very likely the letter she had written to Kitty about me would contain some enlightenment on this point. If only I could get hold of that document, I would

see ; but the chances were that I should not be able to lay hands on it, as Kitty rarely left correspondence about—a carefulness which deprived her maids of a good deal of the amusement they might otherwise have had. On this occasion, however, fortune favoured my desires. When Kitty changed her dress that evening, in taking her handkerchief, purse, and other et-ceteras out of her pocket, she dropped a letter on the floor without noticing its fall ; I, who was standing close by and helping her, instantly covered it with my dress, in hopes it might be the epistle I wanted to see ; I managed to keep it under my feet and dress till she was looking in another direction, and then shoved it under the skirts of the toilette-table, where it was safely out of sight. She finished dressing, and went down to dinner, without having perceived the loss ; and as soon as the coast was clear, I rushed to the table, and extracted the letter, which I had hidden there. On opening it, I found, to my delight, that it was the one from Lady Mervyn about me ; the contents sufficiently explained why she should have condescended to discuss so humble an individual as myself with Sir Bartholomew, showing that it was all owing to the interference of Perkins, and that I had only him to thank for the misfortune by which I was now overtaken.

After relating what I already had heard from Kitty, Lady Mervyn went on to say :

“ It was only by the merest accident that we came to hear anything about the matter. Your father’s valet, Perkins, is member of some club or other (fancy one’s servants having clubs, like gentlemen! I can’t think why parliament doesn’t make them illegal), to which a man who used to be with Sir Bartholomew belongs also. With this man Perkins happened to make acquaintance, and, on hearing where he had been in service, asked him if he knew Lady Brown’s last maid, Jill, who was now abroad with you.”

Ah, thought I, when I had read so far, I can quite believe that that spiteful wretch Perkins, directly he thought he had met an old fellow-servant of mine, lost no time in going spying and sniffing about, and trying to rake up some ill-natured story against me! *I* know his tricks and his manners, as the doll’s dressmaker in *Our Mutual Friend* used to say.

“ When Perkins said that, however,” continued the letter, “ the man stared at him, and declared he was talking nonsense. Lady Brown’s last maid, the man asserted, had been called Smith; had married a man named Roberts soon after her mistress’s death; and had then gone with

her husband to live at Liverpool, where she had been ever since, to his positive knowledge. This seemed very odd to Perkins, and made him suspect there was something amiss, so he, very properly, told me of what he had heard. As it happened that Sir Bartholomew had returned to England, I had no difficulty in learning the truth from the fountainhead ; and now that I have just had an interview with him, I write at once to tell you the result. *Of course* you will not lose a moment about handing the odious woman over to the police as a forger and impostor. I shan't be a bit surprised to find that they want her already, and know lots of other things against her; goodness only knows what she is—thief, coiner, swindler, incendiary, or anything! It is so lucky that we should have found her out in time. Mind that you see all your things are quite right, and if they are not, have her boxes searched. Don't pay her anything, by the by. I should not think a person who gets a situation as she has done can claim wages—it would be getting money under false pretences, I fancy. At any rate, there's no need to hurry about paying until we find out whether we are legally bound to or not."

Having perused the letter I folded it up, and replaced it where Kitty had let it fall on the floor,

so that she might find it there whenever she missed it, and went to search for it.

One thing, at all events, the letter proved clearly, and that was that Lady Mervyn's servants had spoken with perfect truth when they said she was mean ; for how contemptibly mean and petty was her suggestion about withholding my wages ! It seemed to me that as I had earned them honestly I was unquestionably entitled to them, whatever my character might be. And I might conclude that Kitty, who was not so little-minded as her mother, and whose pride made her incapable of an ignoble action, took the same view of the matter that I did ; for I knew that if she had intended obeying her mother's instructions about dismissing me unpaid, she would certainly not have mentioned, as she had done, that I was to receive the full amount due to me. Honour and truth were integral parts of her character, and apparent in all her dealings ; and though I was not myself sensitively particular about those things, yet I could not help admiring them in her all the same.

Well, I had not deserved badly of her, I thought ; and in reviewing my past conduct it seemed to me that, on the whole, she had not much reason to complain of me. No doubt, my acquisition of her purse at the railway station had been

somewhat questionable ; but, after all, it had only been picked up—not stolen ; and my subsequent retention of it had been caused chiefly by pique, because my feelings had been hurt for the moment, when I found that she had forgotten me. Since I had been her maid I had, I considered, served her faithfully enough ; and so I would continue to do during the short remaining period of being in her service. This resolution, be it said, was prompted by no ulterior views of self-interest, as I was quite aware of the impossibility of my ever referring to her for a character. But she had declined to rob me of my wages and send me to prison, as her mother would have had her do, and had also troubled herself to soften the dismissal in some way, and I wished to show that I appreciated the consideration with which she had treated me, and was not ungrateful for it. Consequently I omitted nothing that it was in my power to do for her comfort on the journey back to England, and performed my duties as her maid up to the last moment of quitting her every bit as zealously as though I had hoped to gain some advantage by my attentions.

At Charing Cross Station we separated, to the intense astonishment of her aunt, who as yet knew nothing of what had taken place. They went one

way and I went another ; and thus I was cut off from the first person I had ever come across who possessed the gift of arousing the sluggish capacity for affection which lay dormant in my cold-blooded nature. Our being parted was entirely the doing of that abominable Perkins ; and, as I looked after her with a sigh, I relegated him to the same place as my stepmother amongst my enemies, and regarded him with sentiments of similar detestation.

CHAPTER VII.

A DOGGY PLACE.

WHEN first cut adrift from Kitty, I felt disgusted with service and had a great mind not to be a maid again, because I knew I should hate waiting on any other mistress. But people who have to earn their own living cannot afford to be fanciful, and reflection soon showed me the unwisdom of throwing up in a pet a profession in which I had now acquired some little experience ; so, within a couple of days after my return to London, I was once more advertising for a place as travelling-maid.

The next consideration was how I was to get myself a character, as I certainly could not apply to my late employers for one. Of course it was open to me to supply myself with it in the same way I had done before ; but though I had then thought it a good joke and laughed at the deception I practised, yet somehow I did not find myself taking to the idea nearly as kindly now. I had

been in the habit of making fools of people for the mere fun of the thing, and had regarded a falsehood much as the historian Green says that Queen Elizabeth did, *i.e.* as an intellectual means of meeting a difficulty. But my views seemed to have undergone an alteration of late, and I was conscious of a certain amount of repugnance for what was untrue, which perhaps showed that my intercourse with Kitty had had some effect in educating my conscience, and that I had imbibed something of her contempt for lies. Therefore I hesitated about writing a false character; and no doubt my scruples were all the more lively in consequence of my recent detection and narrow escape of prosecution for forgery; for I had a horror of going to prison.

Consider as I might, however, I could see no honest way out of the difficulty. A character I *must* have, as without one I had no chance of a situation, and without a situation I should starve. And as I had no one to give me a character, I was bound to give it myself. So—with a sigh for my own roguery—I took a pen and indited an epistle, highly recommending Caroline Jill, from a lady with whom she had lived two years and eight months, and who, before departing for the Cape (where she did not want to be accompanied by a maid) had written this character for the aforesaid

Jill. I flatter myself it was an artistic composition, decidedly complimentary, and yet not ascribing to me such perfection as might arouse suspicion by its incompatibility with the frailty of human nature.

After waiting for two or three weeks without receiving a single answer to my advertisement, and searching the papers diligently during that time without discovering any place advertised of the kind that I wanted, I came to the conclusion that travelling-maids were at a discount just at present. Living in lodgings and earning nothing was too expensive a process to be continued long, so it seemed to me that I had better alter my plans, and try and be something which was *not* at a discount. Should I go in for being a shopwoman? But that was a monotonous existence, I thought, with not enough chance of variety and amusement to suit me. And then it struck me that I might let my talents as courier-maid lie idle for a while, and try for an ordinary lady's-maid's situation. I knew that my lack of dressmaking knowledge was much against that scheme; but still I *might* have the luck to meet with one of those ladies who always have their dresses made out. At any rate I determined to make the attempt.

As soon as possible next morning I procured one or two newspapers, copied the addresses of as

many advertisers for ladies-maids as I should be able to go and see in the day, and set off to call upon these ladies. At every place, however, I found that dressmaking was an indispensable qualification, and I returned to my lodgings weary and unsuccessful. Next day I repeated the process with no better result; and on the third day also it was just the same story over again. Wherever I went there was a universal demand for dressmaking on the part of the maid; and I began to wonder if, in all England, there existed such a person as a struggling dressmaker; and if so, why she did not instantly take to lady's-maiding.

Though discouraged by these repeated failures, I thought I would still persevere a little longer before giving up, and accordingly started on a fourth day's round as before. In the course of them I came to the house of a Mrs. Torwood, who lived in Chester Square. My ring at her bell was not answered for several minutes, and I was thinking of repeating it when a noise something like a miniature steam-engine approaching from within the house made me pause to see what was coming. Directly afterwards the door was opened, and I perceived that the puffing and blowing I had heard proceeded from a fat, apoplectic-looking man-servant, to whom stairs were evidently anti-

pathetic, and who was panting tremendously after his ascent from the inferior regions to the front-door. Being too much out of breath to waste words, he only nodded affirmatively when I inquired whether his mistress was at home and disengaged.

"Then please will you go and tell her," I said, "that I have called about the maid's place, and ask if she can see me now?"

By this time he had recovered sufficiently to be able to speak.

"Why it's *hanother* of 'em! Is this never going to hend?" he groaned in a melancholy voice, when he heard what my errand was. Then, some happy thought seemed to occur to him, for his face brightened, and he muttered to himself, "But why shouldn't she and me settle it? *I'll* soon see if its hany good her going further." And without stirring from the spot, or giving the slightest indication of any intention of taking my message, he addressed me thus:

"'Scuse me hasking, miss, but was your father, or hany near relative of yours, a 'untsman?"

"No," I answered; whereupon his countenance fell a little, and he resumed:

"Or a gamekeeper, p'raps?"

I repeated the negative, and he looked still more disappointed, but continued:

"No hoffence, miss, if I hasks one more question, and that is, 'ave you never, in hany way, bin abitooally brought in contack with kennels, or packs of 'ounds?"

I shook my head ; feeling not a little astonished at all this questioning.

"Hah, then there's not a ghost of a chance as you'll take the place," he exclaimed regretfully, "and you may as well say good day, for I can't in conshence hadvise you to go a wasting of your vallyable time with seeing the missis ! I'm sorry —very ; for I'm quite sick of a hopening this old door to maids come about the sitooation, and I did 'ope as you might 'ave done, and put a hend to it. But its no use ; from what you've told me, I can see plainly as you won't do."

That the man was a character was evident ; but as I was getting tired of standing talking to him, and did not at all wish to receive his confidences about his employers, I politely reiterated my former request that he would go and find out if his mistress would see me.

"Well ; but 'aven't I just *told* you as it's no good ?" he returned, looking at me with an air of aggrieved surprise. "When I tells you as I *knows* as you hain't the individooal for the place, can't you go hoff agin quietly, without a giving no more

trouble? If you 'aven't no considerashin for yourself, you might 'ave some for *me*, and not give me all the wear and tear of toiling hup a lot of steps just for nothing."

The seriousness with which he seemed to expect that I should accept his opinion, and be satisfied to go away without having seen the lady of the house, was intensely ludicrous, and I had some difficulty in keeping my countenance.

"I am quite grieved to be so troublesome," I said, "but I have a strange fancy for always making sure for myself whether a place will suit me or not, and I'm afraid I really must ask you to be so good as to let the lady know I am here."

He did not at all resent this (to him, probably, incomprehensible) pertinacity on my part, but only put on a sort of resigned-martyr air, saying :

"Come halong then, since you hinsists hupon it. But you'll soon find as I was right, and p'raps that'll make you less hinkredulous of my words hanother time. If you honly knowed what a lot of maids I've a took hup these 'ere blessid stairs and down hagain, all for nothing! Putting a hunfair strain hupon a man's lungs, *I* considers it; but there!—people *are* so thoughtless."

He took care to reduce the strain upon his lungs to a minimum by making me accompany him as

far as the first landing on the stairs, and wait there whilst he proceeded to the drawing-room. Thus, when he had ascertained that his mistress would see me, it was only necessary for him to lean over the bannisters and beckon, whereby he avoided having to descend any steps to fetch me, and could wait placidly till I joined him on the first floor to be ushered into Mrs. Torwood's presence.

There were dogs dispersed about the room in all directions, and my entrance was the signal for a sudden chorus of sharp barks, which gave me some clue to a comprehension of the butler's enigmatical allusions to a kennel. It would have been impossible to hear oneself speak had the clamour continued; but it subsided as quickly as it had arisen, and, with two exceptions, the dogs took no more notice of me. One exception was a terrier, who uttered subdued yaps at intervals, as if half-ashamed of it; and the other was a collie, who thought he would like my umbrella (which I held in my hand), and who kept sidling up with an innocent air, and giving unobtrusive tugs at the coveted object from time to time, apparently in hopes of getting possession of it at some unguarded moment when I might be too much engrossed in talking to his mistress to notice his proceedings. The rest of the dogs, however, evidently thought that they had done

their duty conscientiously when they had proclaimed my advent, and that there was no need to pursue the subject further. Very possibly they considered barking to be the proper canine equivalent to the human practice of announcing a visitor's name, which is only done on the visitor's entrance, and not repeated afterwards.

Mrs. Torwood looked to me pretty, elegantly dressed, and silly, and I guessed her age to be about thirty. She began by asking me my name; after I had told her that, I expected the usual queries as to qualifications would follow, and waited with dread for the mention of that abominable dressmaking which had so often been my rock ahead. But her next remark was quite unlike anything I had anticipated. She hesitated a moment, and then said :

“ You see these dogs of mine? Well, I can assure you that they are the nicest, best-behaved darlings possible, and not a bit of trouble. Why any one should mind doing anything for them, I can't conceive; but so many maids *do* object to it, for some unaccountable reason or other, that I had better tell you at once that I expect my maid to brush and comb these dogs every morning and take them out walking, besides washing them once a week. So if you would dislike that, of course it is no use my thinking of engaging you.”

Certainly this was rather a variety on the ordinary ideas of what a lady's-maid's duties would be ; but as I had always been fond of animals, I did not feel averse to the notion. Still, as Mrs. Torwood evidently thought it likely that I should make difficulties about undertaking the dogs, I would not be in too great a hurry to consent, and would appear to make rather a favour of it. So I paused to consider, and then asked : "How many dogs are there to look after, m-m ?"

"There are six at present," she replied ; "but of course, if I were to get any new ones, you would have them also."

It flashed upon me that here was an excellent opportunity for escaping the demand for dress-making which had hitherto been my stumbling-block at every place for which I had applied.

"I have never been expected to take care of any lower animals before," I said, speaking as like a dignified lady's-maid as I could ; "still, I would not object to oblige you by doing so, provided no dressmaking is required."

"Why not?" she inquired, looking surprised.

"Because I know I should not have time for it," I answered.

"Oh, but the dogs won't take you the whole day," she returned. "I don't say you would have

time for a great deal of dressmaking. But surely you might manage just a little—especially if you weren't hurried about it?"

"There will be you to wait upon, and your clothes to keep in order, m-m," said I, "and that, with washing, combing, and taking out six dogs, is quite as much as I could *think* of undertaking to get through in the day; because if I undertook anything more, I know I should only fail to give you satisfaction."

She hesitated. She had, however, met with so many maids who had from the first moment flatly refused to have to do with her pets, that one like me, who had no objection to them, seemed to her a *rara avis*. Besides, her present maid was just going away, and she was in a hurry to secure another. And therefore, after a little more opposition, my firmness carried the day, and the obnoxious dressmaking was conceded. Then we discussed other details, and I had to produce the character with which I was provided. This, and the account of myself which I gave, being deemed satisfactory, the interview terminated in my engagement as her maid—upon which office I was to enter in another three days.

She rang the bell when I left the room, and in the hall I found the fat butler waiting to see that

I left the premises without committing any depre-
dations on the plate or other portable property.

"Well ; so now you knows as I was right, I s'pose, and that you might as well 'ave gone away at once when I told you," he observed.

"Not exactly," I returned, "seeing that I have taken the situation."

"You don't say so!" he cried joyfully, elevat-
ing his eyebrows in extreme surprise. "Thank
goodness for that ; and I honly 'opes as you'll
keep it, so as I shan't 'ave no more worrit with
maids coming about the place! What haggera-
vated me, you see, was knowing all the time as
they was *sure* not to take it, and that I was just
a trotting hup and down them beastly old stairs,
all for nothing. A man doesn't like to think as
he's being sackerified in vain ; and that there's
no hobjeck in heggershuns sitch as may land him
in a consumpshun or a hastma."

"But you made sure once too often," I said,
laughing ; "you declared that it was no use show-
ing *me* upstairs, and yet you were wrong, you see."

"Not a bit of it," he retorted severely ; "no
young 'ooman need think as she'll make me out
wrong so heasy as all that. Did you never 'ear
tell of the eggsepshun as proves the rule ? Because
that's what *you* are, let me tell you ; and I doesn't

form my judgement by eggsepshuns but by rules ! Precious slow those eggsepshuns are in showing themselves, too, sometimes. I've known one keep a man waiting till he's just wore out, instead of 'urrying to the fore sharp when 'twas wanted, as it *might* 'a done."

Having thus refuted the charge of error, and given me a pretty broad hint that I—by not making my appearance on the scene sooner—had incurred the responsibility of his numerous needless journeys up and downstairs on behalf of aspirant maids, he relaxed his severity, and bid me good-bye with a graciousness which showed he bore no malice for the injuries I had done him.

I returned his farewell civilly, little dreaming that this man would ever give me a means of annoying my hated step-mother ; then I went straight to buy a dog-whistle, which seemed to me a most essential article for Mrs. Torwood's maid to possess.

It was on that same day, I remember, that the papers announced the engagement of the Hon. K. Mervyn to Lord Clement. I had not expected it to come quite so soon, but otherwise I was not at all surprised ; for I had never doubted that the Earl's chance of winning her would go up as soon as Captain Norroy was out of the question.

CHAPTER VIII

A DISCOVERY.

MRS. TORWOOD was lady-like, good-natured, indolent, rather foolish, easily-influenced, not difficult to get on with, and thinking more of her clothes, her appearance, and her dogs, than anything else. She spoilt these last terribly, and let them do whatever they pleased. But I liked them for all that ; indeed, if it had not been for them, I doubt whether I should not have found myself too much bored in the situation to stay there, for their mistress was very uninteresting in my eyes, and did not move about enough to please me. Her pets, however, had considerably more individuality than she had, and afforded me sufficient amusement and occupation to keep me contented. As my ignorance of dressmaking had prevented me from getting other places that I had tried for, and as it was through the dogs that I had at last surmounted that obstacle, mere gratitude would have prompted me to do well by them, even if the work

of looking after them had been distasteful to me. But this was not the case, thanks to my fondness for animals ; and it was not long before they and I were on the best of terms together.

In some respects, however, they caused me a good deal of anxiety. The chief of these causes was the daily airing which it was my duty to give them ; and I was always thankful to find myself safely at home again without either of my charges being lost or stolen, or having got into any mischief. I used to take them out singly and in a chain just at first ; and as soon as our acquaintance was sufficiently advanced for me to discard the chain, I took them two at a time. But I did not venture to go beyond that number when in town, as all the dear creatures had some little characteristic peculiarity or other, which made it necessary to keep a sharp look-out upon each individual during the whole walk, if one did not want to lose them or get into a scrape. If I enumerate these little peculiarities, I think it will be evident that my precaution of not taking more than two together was not uncalled-for.

I will begin with Dart, a terrier whose mouth always watered after the calves of children's legs, though he only wanted to enjoy the feel of the flesh between his teeth, and had not the least wish

to do any real harm. As soon as he saw a pair of these tempting objects anywhere near, he would go and join the owner, wagging his tail, smoothing back his ears, smiling, wriggling his body, and altogether looking sweet enough to inspire confidence in the breast of the most distrustful infant. Then, turning his head insidiously as he walked along, he would seize the nearest calf, give it a good squeeze, and depart hastily, leaving the victim more frightened than hurt, howling dismally, kicking, and struggling. Of course it was easy to prevent the catastrophe by recalling him the instant he assumed an expression of extra-amiability, and set off in the direction of a barelegged child ; but, as barelegged children are plentiful in London, it was obviously well for whoever had charge of Dart to keep an eye upon him constantly.

Yarrow, again, was a collie who had a rooted conviction that his constitution required carriage exercise, and who never failed to do his best to give effect to that idea by trying to get into any carriage, cab, or 'bus whose door he saw open. This habit of his sometimes gave rise to laughable scenes, as, for instance, one day when he skipped up the steps of an extremely grand barouche, just as the gorgeously-apparelled footman was holding the door open for his mistress to get in, whilst a

dignified butler, and a couple more men in gorgeous liveries were respectfully attending her to the door of the house she was leaving. The flunkey at the carriage nearly fell backwards with horror, but did not venture to interfere with the audacious intruder, so Yarrow settled himself in triumph on the front seat, and sat there at ease with his tongue hanging out, and shedding drops on the smart cushions which he was profaning. He looked blandly at the dismayed servants—not one of whom dared lay a finger on him—and at the lady standing laughing on the doorstep of the house ; and how the scene would have terminated if I had not arrived to the rescue and dislodged him, I cannot imagine. He was complete master of the situation as far as the servants were concerned ; but I suppose one of them would eventually have called a policeman if I had not intervened.

A third member of my pack was Royal, a fat King Charles, who always made me wish I had eyes in the back of my head. He was the veriest dawdle that ever existed, and was possessed with the idea that whoever took him out was walking too fast, and that it was his duty to protest against such haste ; therefore, no matter how slowly one went, he was sure to lag far behind. His dilatoriness was especially provoking, because of his being

so handsome and well-bred as to be unusually attractive to dog-stealers ; and many a collision have I had with other street passengers in consequence of walking backwards so as not to lose sight of that precious animal.

I come next to Sue, a spaniel of inordinate appetite, who, like Royal, kept me in a continual state of alarm during her walks lest she should be stolen. As she *never* thought she had had enough to eat, she was sure to follow any one who carried food, and would also constantly stop to sniff about in the gutter in search of something to satisfy her cravings ; for she was not in the least dainty, and devoured everything edible with relish. She was a shocking thief, too ; and now and then, before I could stop her, she would manage to whip a beef-steak or mutton-chop off some butcher's tray that had been left unguarded by the area-rails whilst the butcher was below enjoying a gossip with the cook. On these occasions I felt a little puzzled how to act. To let Sue carry off her prize quietly would be robbing the butcher, and I did not want to be dishonest if I could help it. Yet, if the man knew what had happened, he would probably make a bother and claim damages, and I did not want that either. So I adopted the middle course of running after Sue, taking the meat from her

and restoring it to the tray, and getting clear off from the spot as quickly as possible before the return of the owner. This arrangement seemed to me fair to all parties, as it saved me from unpleasantness, and, at the same time, did no wrong to the butcher. No doubt his customers would not buy the meat if they knew it had been in the dog's mouth, and would declare it to be disgusting and uneatable ; but then the idea is everything in matters of taste ; and as the little accident with Sue would be unknown, the meat would be eaten without a qualm, and was therefore undeteriorated in value, I argued ; for I was sure it was not *really* any the worse. Sue often aggravated me also in respect of poor working men eating an *al fresco* breakfast or dinner. As soon as ever she saw one of these men, off she would go, and sit up on her hind-legs in front of him, begging with glistening eyes, slobbering mouth, and an eagerness that might have made one think she was starving, if her sleek sides had not told a different tale. Her beseeching face and manner generally produced an effect, and I have seen many a man, who looked ill able to afford a morsel out of his scanty meal, throw her a scrap. I always interfered with this little game of hers, and prevented her from being given anything if I could get to the spot in time ;

for I felt quite ashamed to be in charge of an evidently well-fed dog like her, who went sponging upon poor people who probably had not enough for themselves—I almost wondered she had not too much self-respect to do it.

Chose was a light-hearted French poodle, with a strong taste for sport, which had, unluckily, never been developed in the right direction. Sheep appeared to him to be quite legitimate game, and he never could see them without trying to sneak off in their direction, with a drooping tail and general air of depression, which may have been caused by a consciousness of wrongdoing, or else by fear of being recalled before he was out of reach, and thus deprived of the *chasse* on which his heart was set. As for birds, he considered all to be fair game alike, and rushed madly after any feathered creature that was sitting or running on the ground, or flying low anywhere near him. Repeated failure did not discourage him; he evidently believed it to be his mission to catch birds, and dashed off accordingly in frantic pursuit of rooks, swallows, chaffinches, sparrows, and other birds on the wing, though he had no more chance of catching them than he had of jumping over the moon. This was all very well when he hunted wild birds that could fly away; but it was a more serious matter when

poultry were concerned, and the scrapes he got into with ducks and chickens in the course of his career would require a chapter to enumerate.

Finally, I come to Jumbo, a diminutive terrier, with a mania for digging, who was the abomination of all the gardeners in his neighbourhood. Soft, freshly-turned earth was an irresistible temptation to him; and if not watched carefully, he was sure to slip off to the nearest flower-bed in park, square, or garden, and there dig gigantic graves in a surprisingly short space of time. I expect he thought that, considering what a lot of moles, rabbits, rats, and mice had holes underground, he must infallibly light upon some one of these creatures at last, if he persevered in his researches long enough. He had also a weakness for flowers, and liked to pick them for himself; so, altogether, I don't wonder he was not loved by gardeners, one of whom once remarked to me indignantly :

“ That 'ere dawg o' yours is the werry wusstest little beast I ever see! I'd just like to take and give 'im to one o' them 'ere willysectin doctors, *that I would!*”

Well, those six dogs gave me a good bit of trouble in one way or other, no doubt; and all the more because their mistress spoilt them, and did not try to get them out of their bad ways, and

they were not with me long enough for me to be able to undo the effect of her spoiling. But they amused me and I liked them, notwithstanding their troublesomeness ; and when I went near them it pleased me to hear the thump thump of tails against the ground, which showed that I was welcome.

The Torwoods kept no indoor man-servant except the butler already mentioned, who rejoiced in the name of Eliezer Scroggins ; and as he was a respectable, steady-going married man, I found, to my great satisfaction, that I was in no danger of suffering from persecutions like those of the detestable Perkins. I got on very well with Scroggins, and was often amused by his peculiarities ; for he was (as I had guessed at first) somewhat of a character, though a very good sort of fellow, for all that. His prejudices were very strong, and he was sure to cling with pigheaded obstinacy to whatever idea he had taken into his head. I soon discovered that amongst his pet aversions were people who, in his opinion, gave themselves airs, and presumed to push their way up to a station above that in which they had been born. Such people he hated as he hated stairs—perhaps more ; and no matter whether they moved in his mistress's sphere of life or his own, they irritated him as the proverbial red rag does the

bull. Indeed, I rather suspect that he sometimes had premeditated accidents when any of these objects of his dislike were dining at the Torwoods, and that any visitor of theirs who was considered by him to be what he called a “parvenyoo” was not at all unlikely to receive a bath of soup, sauce, tea, coffee, or wine, or to suffer from some similar misadventure, caused by the intentional clumsiness of the butler.

His bitterness on the subject of people who had risen above their natural position was so great that I had little doubt of there being some particular reason for it; and idle curiosity moved me to try and find out what that reason was, though I never for an instant supposed that the history could be one in any way specially concerning *me*. However, he did not choose to confide his private family affairs to a complete stranger; and so, though he dropped occasional dark hints, whence I concluded that he had a step-sister whom he detested, yet it was not till I had been nearly a year in Mrs. Torwood’s service that I at last was permitted to know the cause of his inveterate spite against the whole race of parvenus.

His mother, it appeared, had been twice married, and he was her child by the second marriage. Her first husband was a clerk named Brown, who had

died before he was thirty, leaving only one child, a daughter named Mary. He had had rather exalted ideas about education, and had no opinion of home teaching, and consequently had sent his daughter to a cheap boarding-school as soon as ever she was old enough to leave home.

After Brown's death his young widow had married into a social position a shade below that of the clerk, and become the spouse of a grocer in the East End, named Joshua Scroggins, to whom in due time she presented my friend Eliezer, and sundry other children.

On the second marriage the grocer, a good-hearted conscientious man, had declared that it would be a shame for her daughter Mary not to have the same education as her own father would have given her, so he generously went on paying for her at the school where she had been already placed. Here the girl picked up a fair education, and also many ridiculous and fine ideas. She took to spell her name with an "e" at the end ; would sooner have died than let her school-fellows know that she was connected with a small retail shop-keeper bearing a name so odiously vulgar as Scroggins; and brooded over the grievance of having so unpresentable a step-father, until she became convinced he had done her a mortal injury

by marrying her mother, and got into the habit of disliking and despising him in spite of the kindness and liberality with which he always treated her. Now Scroggins was an honest hard-working man, who minded his shop in person, with the assistance of his wife and children; though he had managed to defray Mary's schooling, yet the expense had now and then pressed on him a little heavily, and he had not the least intention of keeping her as an idle fine lady when she left school for good and came to live at home, but expected her to take her turn in the shop, as the rest of the household did. Her disgust at this was intense, and she showed it by doing her work as badly as she dared, scolding and flouncing about the house, and losing no opportunity of making herself generally disagreeable.

The Scroggins family—consisting of father and mother, and four children, of whom my friend Eliezer was the eldest—had hitherto lived in unbroken peace and harmony, and now groaned sorely under the infliction of the new-comer, with her airs and graces and tantrums. The recollection of her being fatherless kept them from resenting her nonsense as it deserved, and made them more gentle and patient with her than they would perhaps have been otherwise; but it was felt by all

to be a blessed relief when the disturbing element was removed by marriage to a city gent. He was in business, but did not keep a shop, and so she graciously condescended to accept him as a means of escape from the intolerable humiliation of serving behind her step-father's counter. The city gent proved a good speculation. A few lucky ventures gave him a rise in the world; and when, in the course of years, he left her a widow, her social position was very considerably better than it had been when she first became his wife. By the time he died, all intercourse between her and the Scrogginses had long been at an end. Though she had not hesitated to receive a dowry from her step-father, yet she had never evinced the smallest gratitude for that, or any of the numerous other benefits he had bestowed upon her. On the contrary, she took no trouble to conceal her aversion to him; declared that vulgarity was necessarily attached to such a name as Scroggins; and, after her marriage, saw less and less of the family, and rudely checked all friendly advances on their part, till at last she succeeded in altogether cutting the connection. Mrs. Scroggins—a peace-loving, kindly soul, who could not bear to be mixed up in any kind of dissension—was grieved by this, and by the separation from her daughter, though it was no

fault of hers, and she could not possibly help it. But she bore no malice, and when the news came of her son-in-law's death, she thought only of her daughter's present distress, and forgot the many slights and insults that had been cast upon her and hers. Full of unaffected hearty sorrow and sympathy, she set off immediately to visit the bereaved Mary, hoping to be able to comfort her and be of use to her. What took place on the occasion of this visit Eliezer never exactly knew. But he knew well that the reception of his good-hearted and forgiving mother must have been both unseemly and unpleasant, when he saw her return home in tears, thoroughly upset, and saying that she could not have believed any woman would have behaved so rudely to her own mother ; and that, unless she was sent for, she would *never* again try to see Mary. This had made a deep impression on Eliezer, who adored his mother ; and the bitter enmity he had ever since cherished against the person who had treated her so badly, and whom he regarded as an upstart, had extended to the whole race of "parvenyoos."

"Do you know what has become of your step-sister ?" I asked carelessly ; "and do you ever see her ?"

"See 'er !" he ejaculated wrathfully ; "not if I

knows it. I'm none so fond of raising my corruption by looking at what I 'ates ! But I 'ears tell on 'er now and agin ; she married some swell with a 'andle to 'is name some years back. Mary Grove's clever enough—you may trust 'er to do well for 'erself wherehever she is."

In telling his tale he had not before mentioned the name of his step-sister's husband ; but when he spoke of Mary Grove, I pricked up my ears with a sudden recollection that that had been the name of my step-mother. "Was Grove the name of the city gent ?" I enquired eagerly.

Scroggins nodded.

"Had they any children ?" I continued.

"A couple o' gals named Jane and Margret there was," he returned ; "I don't know what they be like now, for I ain't seen 'em—not since they was little mites o' things."

Jane and Margaret ! these had been the names of my step-sisters, and I felt almost sure that his step-sister and my step-mother must be one and the same person. One more question would make the matter absolutely certain, so I said : "What was the name of Mary Grove's second husband—do you know it ?"

"Oh yes, I knows it ; but I can't lay tongue to it at this moment. What hever is it now ? Sir

Hanthony something or other—I should know it if I was to 'ear it."

"Was it anything like——" I began, and then paused. Never once had my own name passed my lips since I left home, and somehow now, when I tried to say it, it seemed to stick in my throat. Overcoming this feeling, however, I completed my sentence—"like Trecastle?" It was strange how, in spite of my first hesitation about uttering the word, yet when once it was out, my tongue clung lovingly to it, and I should have liked to repeat it over and over again. I thought it sounded better than any other name I had ever heard, and felt a thrill of pride to think that it was mine by right.

"That's the very thing!" he exclaimed triumphantly; "Sir Hanthony Trecassel, and I wishes 'im joy of 'is bargain! 'Ow never did you come to think of 'im?"

"Oh, I had heard of a Sir Anthony Trecastle before," I replied, "and so when you started me with the first name, the second suggested itself quite naturally."

Here our conversation was interrupted, and I retired to meditate complacently on the means of being revenged on my step-mother, which fortune had so kindly thrown in my way. There was

nothing *really* to be ashamed of in such a connection as the Scrogginses, who were evidently highly respectable and excellent individuals. Yet few people in society would altogether enjoy having a mother named Scroggins, who sold soap and tallow candles in the East End; and, least of all, the former Mary Brown, who had striven so indefatigably and successfully to cut herself free from every trace of the grocer's shop. It would be gall and wormwood to her to have her secret revealed; and I chuckled with delight to think that it had fallen into my hands, and that the whole world would know it when I chose.

But I would not be in too great a hurry with my vengeance. I would take time about it—prolong her torment by keeping her in suspense, and letting her see the blow coming before it actually fell. Therefore I commenced operations by posting to her an anonymous letter in a feigned hand, stating that the writer was a benevolent individual to whom the spectacle of domestic discord was inexpressibly shocking, and who was much inclined to undertake the good work of endeavouring to bring about a public reconciliation between the Scrogginses and one of their family who had long been estranged from them.

This would suffice to alarm her and make her

anxious as to what the writer's real intentions were. Perhaps she would think he meant only to extort money—from which idea her parsimonious soul would shrink with horror; or perhaps she would think that he meant to execute his threat, which she would regard as a still more terrible possibility. Either way she would be made miserable, and so my object would be gained.

After leaving some weeks for the digestion of this missive, I despatched another, stating that the writer considered it part of a wife's duty to introduce her husband to her parents ; and that if any wife failed to perform that duty, it behoved some one else to do it in her place.

This I presently followed by a third and still more menacing letter, so as continually to increase her terrors, and keep her perpetually with a sword hanging over her head. At every epistle I sent off I gloated over the thought of the state of disquietude in which she must be ; and as I remembered how uncomfortable she had once made me, I regretted that I could not be present when the letters arrived, so as to have the pleasure of seeing my shafts take effect and wound her. The execution of the threats should come soon, I thought. My intention was to play with her and keep her on tenterhooks for a while, and then to send

anonymous letters containing information of her antecedents to my father, his family, the county people, and others with whom she had formerly been intimate. I should of course give the address of the Scroggins' shop, so that it would be easy for the recipients of the letters to verify my statement if they cared to do so ; and there could be little doubt that all her bosom friends would give themselves that much trouble, even if mere chance acquaintances did not think it worth while. Therefore there was no danger of the history being hushed up and kept quiet, and of her being spared the humiliation she dreaded.

Before, however, I had brought my operations to a climax, they were interrupted by an unforeseen event, which must be related in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST OF PERKINS.

I DARESAY my readers will take it for granted that I adopted a fresh name when I went into Mrs. Torwood's service. So I most certainly *ought* to have done after my previous forgery of a character having been detected. But sometimes one is astonishingly stupid; and the idea of making that very necessary alteration never entered my head. Caroline Jill I had dubbed myself when I dropped the secretly-venerated name of Trecastle, and Caroline Jill I—like an idiot—continued to be, without having the wits to see how foolish it was of me to stick to a name upon which I had brought discredit. I was now to feel the consequences of this imprudence, the penalty being brought about, indirectly, by three of the dogs under my care.

One morning when I went as usual to call Mrs. Torwood, she said she should stay in bed a little longer, as she had a headache, and that I was to

leave her to sleep till half-past ten, when she meant to get up. It so happened that I was particularly desirous of getting through my work early on that day, and as by taking out the six dogs in two instead of three detachments, I should have just time to give the whole lot their daily airing before the hour when I was to return to my mistress, I determined to break my rule for once, and take them out three together, instead of in couples, as usual.

Behold me, then, sallying forth at about 9.30 A.M., accompanied by the greedy Sue, the vivacious and sport-loving Chose, and the dawdling Royal. Our progress was characteristic of my three companions. First went Chose, trotting ahead of us, and keeping a bright look-out for a chance of a *chasse*. Next came Sue and I—she making occasional foraging excursions into the gutter, and I continually walking backwards and wringing my neck, in order not to lose sight of Royal. Finally came Royal, lagging far behind, with his customary leisurely imperturbability. All went well till we came to where a footman had lounged out from his master's house, leaving the front door open behind him, and was standing a few yards off chatting with a friend. I and my pack had passed there before often enough for the footman to know

us by sight ; and I knew him in the same way, and knew also that his employers had a pet in the shape of a magnificent Persian cat. Now this cat had taken advantage of the open door to come out upon the pavement, where she was sunning herself tranquilly when Chose, who, as I have mentioned, headed our party, drew near to that spot. At sight of puss he stopped short with uplifted paw and quivering tail, and for a second or so the two animals stood motionless and gazing at each other. Then the cat, distrusting his appearance, whisked round, and flew like lightning up the doorsteps into the house. Had she stayed still, Chose might very likely have let her alone ; but the instant he saw her run he became convinced she was game, and therefore to be hunted. I whistled and called to him in vain ; without a moment's hesitation, and paying no attention to me, he dashed after her in hot pursuit across the hall and up the front staircase. Of course it would never do to have him hunting a pet cat all over its owner's house ; so I said to the footman, who was looking on and laughing without seeming to think there was any need for him to interfere : “I'd better run in and fetch the dog back, hadn't I ?”

“All right,” answered he, knowing that I was

not to be suspected of designs on the spoons ; and in I went without more ado.

The family to whom the house belonged would doubtless have been considerably astonished to see a stranger invading their premises in this uncere-monious manner ; but luckily they were still in their bedrooms, and I met with none of them as I rushed after my truant. I followed him upstairs, through the drawing-room, and into a little boudoir on the first floor. Here I found him standing on his hind legs upon a light-blue satin sofa (which bore marks of his dirty feet), and vainly endeavouring to get to the top of a high cabinet where puss had taken refuge. She, feeling herself in security, was indulging in a candid and emphatic expression of opinion respecting her pursuer by growling, spitting, arching her back, swelling out her tail to three or four times its usual size, and now and then striking viciously in his direction with her paw. I imagine this last action was merely meant to relieve her feelings in the same way that fist-shaking relieves those of human beings, for she must have been perfectly well aware that the poodle was quite out of reach from her perch.

Chose was one of those dogs who are always completely subdued directly they find themselves captured, so I had no more trouble with him now

that I had come to close quarters; he followed me downstairs unresistingly, feebly wagging the very tip of his tail, and looking a touching picture of apologetic meekness and penitence.

That smell-feast of a Sue meanwhile had profited by the commotion to get into a little mischief on her own account. Having accompanied me as far as the hall, she had then immediately sniffed out the dining-room, and turned in there in preference to going on with me upstairs, and I, having my head full of Chose, did not attend to her proceedings. In the dining-room there were preparations for breakfast, and Sue's nose guided her unerringly to a side-table whereon some cold meat had been set out. By help of a conveniently placed chair she speedily mounted on to this table, took up a cold chicken of which she thought she could fancy a morsel, jumped down again to the floor, and made off for some safer place where she might hope to enjoy her fowl peacefully.

The footman, thinking it time to go and see what was taking place indoors, bade adieu to his friend, and entered the house just as Sue was in the act of issuing from the dining-room door with the bird in her mouth. He immediately armed himself with a riding whip that lay in the hall, barred her exit from the house, and tried to make

her give up what she had stolen. In this, however, he was unsuccessful ; for though he hit her smartly enough to make her squeak, yet she still clung resolutely to her booty. Consequently, when I came downstairs with the recently-disobedient but now abjectly-submissive Chose at my heels, congratulating myself on being out of this bother, the first thing I saw was Sue, carrying a chicken, scrimmaging from side to side of the hall, and endeavouring to avoid the footman's whip and dodge past him in the street. Very much disgusted at her having thus got into mischief the instant my attention was taken off, I swooped down upon her from the rear ; and as she was only thinking of the foe in front and did not notice my approach, I was easily able to catch hold of her, and enforce the surrender of the bird.

Provoked as I felt with these two dogs for their bad behaviour, I could not stop to scold them much at that moment ; for I was disturbed by the possibility that Royal, too, might have taken it into his head to get into a scrape on this unlucky morning, and I wanted to have him safe under my wing again as soon as possible. Hastily telling the footman that I hoped the chicken was not much the worse, and that I was sorry the dogs had been so troublesome, I hurried off to look for the King

Charles. Even such a slow-coach as Royal had had plenty of time to overtake us by now, and it would not be at all like him to exert himself needlessly by going an inch along the road in advance of the person who had taken him out. Therefore, as he had not made his appearance in the house, I made sure that he must be waiting for me outside.

To my dismay, however, he was nowhere to be seen; look which way I would, not a hair of the precious animal was visible. "Did ever any one see such a handful as these dogs are?" ejaculated I mentally; "and oh, what a fool I was to take out more than two of them at a time!"

I had not the slightest idea in which direction to look for Royal, and was wondering what I had better do, when a ragged little girl whom I had not before observed, ran up and said:

"Please, 'as yer losted suthin?'"

"Yes; a little dog," I returned; "can you tell me where it is?"

"I seed a man pick'n hup and put'n in a bastik, and I thought it warn't hisn, neither," she exclaimed, pointing down the street; "he'm jest gone 'long the fust turn to the right there. Run quick and you'll ketch 'im p'raps."

I delayed not a moment, but set off at full speed; and the two dogs ran with me, greatly excited at

my sudden haste, and mystified as to the cause of it. As for Chose, he forgot all about his penitence, was immediately in the highest spirits, and bounded along with an up-in-the-air, elastic, springing action which implied an unlimited stock of suppressed energy ready to display itself the instant he should succeed in discovering what game I was in pursuit of, and he was to go for.

On reaching the turning indicated, I saw a respectably dressed man with a basket on his arm at some little distance off. When first I saw him he was walking fast in the same direction as I was; at the sound of my footsteps he looked round, and then began to run. Close to the other end of the street was a crowded thoroughfare where it would be easy enough for him to give me the slip ; so I strained every nerve to come up with him before he could get out of the street in which we then were. But it was not an equal race between us ; for he had a start and was quite fresh, whilst I was already a little bit out of breath with running ; and I soon perceived that he would escape unless I could procure assistance.

Thinking Chose might be useful, I tried to incite him to rush on and tackle the man. But he only responded by barking, springing higher than ever in the air, and looking wildly about to find out

what he was being set at. Evidently it never entered his head that he could be meant to hunt a human being.

Two or three times I called out "Stop thief!" But that was mere waste of breath; for the street was empty, and though the cry attracted some of the inhabitants to their doors and windows to see what was going on, no one made any attempt to come to my aid. I suppose they wanted to know the rights of the matter first—and I had not time to stop and explain it just then.

The man had almost gained the end of the street, and I was giving up all hopes of success, when, in the very nick of time, a policeman came in sight just in front of him. My shouts and gesticulations made the policeman comprehend that I wanted the runner stopped. The latter tried to bolt past the official, but was foiled; and, to my joy, I beheld the fugitive captured and held fast. When I came up, I found him expostulating with his captor with an assumption of much virtuous indignation, declaring that he was hurrying to catch a train, that it would be ruin to him to miss it, and that he should hold any one who stopped him responsible for whatever loss he had to suffer in consequence.

"Please look in his basket," I panted to the

policeman, "and see if there isn't a King Charles spaniel in it that he has just stolen."

"In *corse* there's a dawg," exclaimed the fugitive with an air of injured innocence, whilst the policeman lifted up the lid of the basket, and discovered Royal ensconced underneath, "and why not? It's my own dawg as I'm a takin' with me, and 'as I'm 'bliged to carry when I'm in a 'urry cos he can't go fast enough to keep hup. Does the good lady think as no vun 'as a right to 'ave a dawg besides 'erself?"

"Certainly not," replied I, "but that dog is not yours for all that, as you know well enough. He belongs," I continued, addressing the policeman, "to a lady living in Chester Square, whose maid I am. Come there with me, and you will soon see whether this man's story is true or not."

"Oh, hof *corse* you sez that," grumbled the thief, "when I've jest a told you as I can't hafford to miss my train, not on no consideration! But there! what's the lost of a dawg to the lost of a fortin? Take 'im, then, since you hinsists! Do hanythink you pleases, honly don't keep me 'ere no longer."

But the policeman was not to be gammoned. He said we must both go along with him to Chester Square to find out if my story was true;

and added with gentle satire, that as the man claimed the dog and was so unwilling to be parted from it, he might have the pleasure of continuing to carry it in the basket till the real ownership should be proved. And so we all set out together for the Torwood's house, notwithstanding the prisoner's fluent remonstrances and protestations.

As I rather prided myself on being habitually wide-awake and capable of performing whatever I undertook to do, I should have felt it was a disgrace to me to lose one of the dogs ; and therefore I was sincerely thankful to the little girl by whose means I had been saved from incurring such a slur. I saw her loitering at the end of the street, watching the result of my chase ; and as we passed back that way, I went up to thank her for her timely information. So grateful did I feel, that I was pulling out my purse to express my sentiments in a substantial form, when, to my surprise, she stopped me by saying :

“Don’t do that ! I ‘on’t take nothin’ for tellin’ what you wanted to know, cos I was honly payin’ a debt as I’ve owed you this long time.”

Seeing my look of astonishment, she continued :

“ ’Twas you as bought flowers off o’ me so as I could get brexhus, one mornin’ two years back and more, when I was that ’ungrateful I didn’t know what

to do ; and I've hoften thought as I'd like to pay you back for it, and wondered if I should never get a chance. When I seen the chap grab the dawg I didn't mean to say nothin' 'bout it at fust—for I doesn't never care to go gettin' coves into trouble ; but then I see you come out o' the 'ouse, lookin' like as you'd losted suthin ; and I 'membered your face all of a suddint, and I thought if the dawg was yours, I'd tell you where 'twas gone, to pay back what you done for me afore."

I recollect ed the girl now, and saw she was the same whose breakfastless condition had excited my compassion one day long ago, just after I had run away from home and come to London. Certainly she more than repaid what I had done for her then. Value for value, I should have had very much the best of the bargain if the dog had—as she supposed—belonged to me ; for I knew that £30 had been offered and refused for Royal, whereas the amount that I had given her was only a shilling. "I should like to be able to invest all my shillings at that rate of interest !" thought I, as I nodded good-bye to her, and hurried to join the policeman and his prisoner.

Mrs. Torwood regarded dog-stealers with much the same antipathy that some sporting squires seem to feel towards poachers—deeming them

natural enemies to the common weal, who might advantageously be extirpated, root and branch. She had, therefore, no idea of letting slip the excellent opportunity which now presented itself for the punishment of one of these abominated miscreants, and the prosecution of Royal's thief was a matter of course. When the trial came on, naturally I was a principal witness ; and thus the police reports in the paper contained the name of "Caroline Jill, lady's-maid to Mrs. Torwood, of — Chester Square," as having given evidence in a dog-stealing case.

As luck would have it, this caught the eye of my old enemy Perkins, and set him wondering whether the person referred to could be the same individual who had once presumed to reject his advances so rudely. Though he had already been the means of turning me out of one place, yet still his spite was not satisfied ; so (as I suppose) he hung about Chester Square till he had seen me pass, and ascertained my identity ; then he came to our house, and had an interview with Mrs. Torwood.

It happened that I was looking out of the window when he left the house. I was extremely astonished to see him, and still more astonished at the state he was in, for he looked deadly pale, and all

wild and frightened, and was shaking visibly. The sight of him made me uneasy ; for though I had no notion of the object of his visit, still I was sure that his appearance in my vicinity was not likely to bode any good to me.

I took the first opportunity of trying to find out from my friend Eliezer, what the man's business with our mistress had been. But Eliezer could tell me nothing about it ; all he knew was that the party had asked to speak to her, saying that he had something important to say, and that he had left her again after a not very long interview.

“She must have frightened him pretty well, whatever it may have been about,” said I ; “he looked worse than if he’d seen a ghost, when he went away.”

“Ah, he did that,” returned Eliezer, chuckling at the remembrance, “but it was, so to say, hisself as he was ‘feared on. I never see sitch a coward in hall my born days, ’afore.”

This naturally excited my curiosity ; and I made Eliezer tell me what had taken place to give Perkins a fright, which, I need scarcely say, was not an unpleasant hearing to one who owed him a grudge, as I did.

The collie Yarrow, it appeared, had been lying

on a mat in the hall when the visitor departed ; and the latter, not seeing the dog, had inadvertently trodden heavily on his toe. Now Yarrow's temper was, like that of many collies, a little uncertain ; and as, furthermore, he had always a particular objection to have his toes walked upon or hurt, he lost not an instant in retaliating by biting his injurer in the leg. Perkins, startled at first to find himself stumbling over a dog which he had not seen, seemed completely overcome by terror when the stumble was followed promptly by a severe bite ; he staggered back against the wall, turning as pale as ashes, and hardly able to speak. When he had recovered himself a little, Eliezer discovered that the cause of this great fright was, that Perkins had a sort of craze about hydrophobia, and held it in such intense horror that he was really not capable of being reasonable where it was concerned.

Eliezer being the only person handy at the moment, was besieged by Perkins with flurried questions. Wasn't it as bad to be bitten by an animal that was angry as by one that was mad ? How long was it before madness showed in a person who had been bitten by a mad dog ? Was it a *certain* cure to have the place burnt out ? Was there any other less painful remedy ? It

would be so horrid to have one's flesh burnt! but still—hydrophobia would be worse. Whatever should he do?

These and similar questions were poured into the ears of Eliezer as though he had been an authority upon madness, because Perkins was in that state of absurd panic which made him long to hear a word of comfort from any one—no matter who. But he did not get any consolation from Eliezer, who had a hearty contempt for cowards, and rarely lost a chance of tormenting them by playing upon their weakness. Therefore the butler carefully abstained from saying anything reassuring, shook his head and sighed, and affected to think the bite an extremely serious matter. Finally, the victim departed in a state of the utmost disquietude, divided between anxiety to try and put himself in safety by undergoing cauterisation, and fear of the pain which it would cause him.

Whichever way he settled it, he was sure to make himself miserable lest he was going mad for a very long while to come, Eliezer opined, laughing contemptuously at the idea of a man's torturing himself gratuitously in that ridiculous fashion. And my anxiety as to what had brought Perkins there did not prevent my joining in the laugh at his absurd terror and folly.

A day or so elapsed, during which I heard nothing unpleasant from Mrs. Torwood, and I began to hope that, after all, the visit that had alarmed me might have had nothing to do with my affairs. This, however, was not the case. Perkins had told her that I was an impostor, who had been dismissed from my last place because the character with which I obtained it was a forgery. But she was reluctant to have to part with a maid who suited her and got on with the dogs as well as I did, and was not inclined to credit so startling an accusation brought against me by a man whom she had never seen before and knew nothing of. When her husband came home, however, she told him what she had heard, and was advised by him to wait, and say nothing about the matter, till Lady Mervyn had been communicated with to find out whether the story was true or not. That lady, of course, confirmed it entirely; and as the date of my being sent away by her was only a few weeks before I had entered the service of my present mistress, it was very evident to the Torwoods that my second character was as unreliable as my first one, and that the lady who had recommended Caroline Jill before going to the Cape had had no existence save in my own imagination.

Thereupon my fancied security was scattered rudely to the winds. Mrs. Torwood at once informed me of what she had discovered, and said it was impossible that she should allow me to remain in the house a day longer. Her husband, she added, had thought she ought to prosecute me; but she refused to do that, because during the whole time I had been with her (over a year) I had given her no cause of complaint, and had always taken excellent care of the dogs. Therefore she should content herself with insisting on my immediate departure.

It was hopeless for me to deny the misdeeds with which I was charged, so there was nothing for it but to pack up my things and take myself off as soon as might be.

Really, I thought, as I made the requisite preparations, it is very provoking that my employers will not be satisfied to judge me by their own personal knowledge! First there was Kitty, and now there's Mrs. Torwood. I am sure they both of them were well-disposed in my favour, and believed that I served them satisfactorily. Yet they let their own experience go for nothing, and are afraid to keep me in their service, just because I am not provided with the proper conventional, often quite unreliable, certificate of somebody else's opinion of me!

I call it very silly of people to have so little confidence in their own judgment.

As for Eliezer, he was aghast at my sudden flitting, and began ruefully anticipating the many futile journeys up and down stairs that would probably be inflicted upon his cherished lungs before a satisfactory successor to me would be found.

I confess I thought his anticipations very likely to be realised ; for though the place suited *me* well enough, it was not one that many maids would care to take. The general run of abigails study dressmaking as an art, are ambitious of displaying their skill in that line, and naturally turn up their noses at the idea of throwing away their talents by spending the best part of their time in attending to dogs. Whereas I, who had neither taste nor capacity for any form of millinery, regarded the animals as far the most congenial and interesting occupation of the two.

As I reflected indignantly on the behaviour of the mean, spiteful, meddlesome, cowardly Perkins, who had thus a second time been the means of turning me adrift, I rejoiced to think that dear Yarrow had avenged me to *some* extent at all events, though not perhaps as completely as I could have wished. The pain of a bite was not much

of a set-off against the harm he had done me, to be sure ; but then I might add to his sufferings an unknown amount of terror, because of his being such an abject coward as he was ; and there was the chance too of his having thought it necessary to have the bitten place cauterised. Altogether, I thought Yarrow was a most discriminating dog, and my last act before leaving the house was to caress him and give him one of his favourite biscuits.

It proved, however, that he had avenged me more thoroughly than I had imagined, and that Perkins' interference was to cost him his life. His horror of hydrophobia made him take a hot poker and try to burn the bite on his leg ; but his dread of pain made him timid and clumsy, and, letting the poker slip accidentally, he inflicted a really very severe burn upon himself. Being in a bad state of blood at the time, the wound would not heal ; and after a good deal of festering and inflammation, blood poisoning set in, and finally caused his death.

I learnt these particulars from the newspapers, which reported the inquest that was held upon him ; and as this was not till some time after I was dismissed by Mrs. Torwood, I am anticipating the proper course of events by introducing it

here. But I do so because I think that this is the best place to relate what eventually became of him, and in the next chapter I will return to an account of my proceedings in due chronological order.

CHAPTER X.

AN ACCIDENT.

EVIDENTLY the first thing to be done when I was turned out of the Torwood's house was to find a habitation for myself somewhere else; and the search for a suitable lodging occupied me till late in the evening. When at last I had succeeded, I told the landlady that my name was Charlotte Jackson ; for I had learnt wisdom by experience, and, having now perceived the folly of continuing to call myself Caroline Jill, I substituted for it the first name that occurred to me whose initials would correspond to the C. J. with which my linen was marked.

By the time I had taken possession of my new quarters I felt quite ready for supper, and betook myself, therefore, to a neighbouring coffee-tavern, where, for the sum of twopence, I procured a satisfying and not extravagant meal, consisting of a large hunch of good bread and a basin of thick pea-soup, which—though perhaps somewhat coarsely

flavoured—was undeniably savoury and nourishing. Then I returned to my lodging and composed another of the anonymous letters with which I was harassing my stepmother. I took especial pains to make it as unpleasant and likely to alarm her as I could, because it was the last that I intended sending her. I meant to let about a week more elapse, and then to put my threats into execution and proceed to the final act of vengeance, by making known to her husband and friends the whole history of her Scroggins connection.

Having written this letter and directed it all ready to post next day, I proceeded to consider my present situation, and what my next effort for a livelihood should be. But I suppose the pea-soup must have been indigestible, for I was out of sorts somehow, took a gloomy view of things in general, and was unwontedly dispirited about my prospects. My mind seemed to have no elasticity or variety, and would keep reverting to the difficulty of getting a place without a character, and the impossibility of getting a character without forging it. The pitcher that goes often to the well gets broken at last, thought I; and though, hitherto, the detection of my forgeries has brought no worse consequences than dismissal from my situations,

yet I cannot reckon on always escaping so easily. If I do not mind what I am about, I may find myself in prison some fine day ; and to *that* I should object most strongly. It would be too horribly disgraceful ; I should never be able to hold up my head again afterwards !

I could arrive at no settled determination whatever, and finally went to bed in a very bad humour with myself for being so irresolute and inclined to be disheartened.

When I woke next morning I was more cheerfully disposed, and thought I would get a newspaper and give a look at the advertisements. There could be no reason why I should not do that, at all events, as reading them did not by any means necessarily involve answering them. Accordingly I procured a newspaper and proceeded to study it. Here a temptation to recklessness at once presented itself in the shape of a notice setting forth that excellent situations for courier-maids were to be heard of on application to Mrs. Asterisk's registry office. The idea of going abroad again made my mouth water ; and, putting aside the character difficulty for future consideration, I proceeded immediately to Mrs. Asterisk's, paid the preliminary fee without which her lips were sealed, received in return the addresses of a couple of ladies in

want of travelling-maids, and set off to call at one of these addresses.

The way to this place took me near the chief approach to a large railway station, whence a train was shortly about to start; and I had to pause before crossing the road in order to let a string of luggage-laden cabs and carriages go past. In the line of vehicles coming towards where I stood, there was a brougham which exhibited signs of wealth combined with perfect taste, which made me notice it particularly, and wonder who the fortunate owners could be. The colouring, liveries, etc., were as quiet as possible, and there was nothing showy about the turn-out except the splendid pair of high-stepping horses by which it was drawn. But, though not showy, none the less was every detail of its appointments faultless, and I lingered to see if the occupants were as well worth looking at as their equipage was. As the fiery horses came slowly abreast of me, tossing their heads, snorting, and champing their bits with impatience at being delayed, I saw that there was an earl's coronet on the harness, and that a lady and gentleman were in the carriage. In a moment more it was near enough for me to recognise who they were, and then I saw that they were Lord and Lady Clement.

I had not before set eyes on Kitty since I parted from her at Charing Cross ; but I had often and often thought of her, and wondered whether her marriage had brought her happiness ; and now I gazed at her eagerly, trying to guess this from her countenance. Impossible, however, to read the secrets of a face as impenetrable as hers ! All I could tell was, that she looked handsomer than ever, and just a trifle more stern ; and I had an idea, too, that the haughty immovable expression which had been always somewhat characteristic of her had become intensified. Her husband addressed some remark to her, and she answered him promptly with a gracious pleasant smile, that showed them to be on thoroughly good terms together. Yet I fancied it was a smile of conventionality rather than of affection ; it seemed only to come from the lips—the eyes and rest of the face had nothing to do with it ; and I hardly thought it was such a smile as a young wife would be likely to bestow upon a husband who possessed her heart. Yet after all, what did I know of the matter ? It would be absurd for me to think I could form any opinion as to her happiness from a mere glimpse of her like this.

It was strange how the old charm which she had always had for me reasserted itself the instant

I beheld her again. In her I seemed to recognise the sole human being in the world whose affection I would have taken trouble to obtain; and as I looked wistfully after her, thinking that I might possibly have had a chance of it, if it had not been for my stepmother and Perkins, I felt a fresh access of resentment towards them. My stepmother, by making home intolerable, had exiled me from the sphere of life where I could, perhaps, have made friends with Kitty as an equal; and Perkins, by spitefully driving me out of her service, had deprived me of the opportunities I might have had of winning her regard as an inferior. How curious it was that, notwithstanding what untoward circumstances had done to separate us, there yet existed between her and me the sort of half-bond which is involved in the possession of a mutual secret. For had not I discovered the love for Captain Norroy which she had striven zealously to conceal? and did not I know that about her which she believed herself to have kept secret from the whole world?

The carriage went on into the station, and I continued my course without dreaming that the trivial incident of waiting to see Kitty Clement drive by had affected my destiny materially. Such, however, was in truth the

case ; and the way in which it happened was this :

The sight of Kitty had, as I have just said, reminded me of my stepmother ; and that made me think of the letter I had written on the previous night. I had put it in my pocket when I came out, and afterwards forgotten all about it till the present moment. Now, however, that I had remembered it, I thought I would post it at once so as to make sure of not forgetting it again, and accordingly looked about for a post-office. At the corner of a small side street was a pillar-box, which was only a few steps out of my way, so I walked up to it and posted the letter there.

Near by a groom was capering and careering about on an obstreporous horse ; and just as I turned away from the box, the steed sprang on to the pavement in spite of all the rider's efforts to restrain him. There he set to plunging and kicking so close to me, that I was obliged to jump hastily into the road in order to get out of reach of his hoofs. Thinking only of the danger from the animal prancing on the pavement, I did not observe a hansom that was dashing up the side street. It came shaving round the corner at full speed, and in another instant I was knocked down, run over, and stunned.

Then comes a confused recollection of acute pain which made me groan; of being moved; of wishing to know what was happening to me, and feeling absolutely incapable of rousing myself sufficiently to find out. And then I must have lost consciousness altogether; for the next thing I remember is, becoming gradually aware that I was in bed. That one fact was as much as my mind was equal to take in at first; I was not altogether sure of my own identity, and recollect ed nothing whatever of the accident. After lying thus inert for a short time, I opened my eyes and looked at as much as was to be seen without moving my head, which I felt far too languid to do. The result of my observations was, that there were other beds near me, and that I was in a large airy room; I perceived also a prevailing odour of carbolic acid in the place. Had I been in my ordinary condition of energy, I should have been wild to know where I was, and how I came there; but, as it was, I was too limp both in body and mind to be curious or astonished at anything. Therefore I reclosed my eyes with a vague impression that there was something a little odd about my situation; but that as long as I could lie still and do nothing I had all that I desired.

This transient dream of consciousness was

succeeded by an interval during which I can only recollect nightmarish visions and miseries. The next thing that my memory recalls definitely is a short conversation between two people whose voices sounded to me as though coming from some remote distance, though in reality, as I knew afterwards, they were close to my bedside.

“What is this case?” said the first voice.

“It’s a woman who was run over by a cab,” replied the second; “her leg is broken, and she has other injuries also. She was brought in yesterday morning, and hasn’t recovered her senses properly yet.”

“Indeed!” returned the former speaker. “How did you find out her name, then? I see you’ve got it stuck up over the bed.”

“Oh, there was an envelope in her pocket addressed to Caroline Jill, No.—Chester Square,” was the answer. “We sent to the address to ask if she was known there, and to say she had been brought to the hospital. It appeared that she had been lady’s-maid at the house, and been dismissed the day before, and they knew nothing of who her belongings were, or where she lived, or anything about her.”

As I heard no more, I conclude that here the speakers moved away from my bed. The few

words they had said, however, had sufficed to enlighten my cloudy state of mind. At first I had listened without having an idea that *I* could be the person referred to ; but when the name of Caroline Jill was spoken I remembered all about myself, knew clearly who I was, and realised what had occurred to me. Yes ; I had gone to a pillar-box to post the letter to my stepmother, and there had been an unmanageable horse to be avoided. Then there had come suddenly a rattle, a violent concussion, confusion, pain, and utter blank ; and I comprehended that I had been run over and brought to the accident ward of a hospital. I recollect, too, my prudent design of dropping the name of Jill ; and as I realised that that intention was frustrated for the present, I felt a faint trace of amusement at the persistency with which the old childish name had stuck to me.

Was it true that my leg was broken, as those two people had just said ? Very likely. Anyhow I would take their word for it, for I certainly did not feel inclined to stir hand or foot to verify the statement. And as my head ached, and I was quite exhausted with the effort of so much consecutive thought, I speedily relapsed into my former comatose condition.

When next I recovered my senses, my head

was clear ; I remembered directly how I came to be in a hospital, and looked around me. It was night, and by the dim light of a shaded lamp I could see the nurse in charge of the ward sitting in an upright-backed wooden chair, where she had fallen fast asleep notwithstanding the hardness and discomfort of her seat. I could see, too, a glass containing lemonade standing on a table near the head of my bed, and, as I was parching with thirst, I managed slowly, and with difficulty, to draw one hand out from under the bed-clothes, and stretch it out towards the tempting drink. Alas ! the glass was out of my reach. The sight of the delicious liquid made my thirst grow worse and worse, till it seemed quite unendurable, and I was impelled to try and wake the nurse, to ask her to give it to me. Accordingly I called out to her as loudly as I could. But my utmost efforts produced only a wheezing feeble sound, which was powerless to produce any impression on her slumbers. The amount of fatigue which it cost me to uplift my voice was quite disproportionate to the insignificance of the result, and I was so tired with the attempt to make myself heard, and the exertion of getting my hand out of bed and reaching after the glass of lemonade, that I realised it was useless to think of waking the nurse, and

that I must resign myself to bear the thirst as best I could, till she should wake of herself. Mortification at my helplessness, and profound pity for my poor dear self, caused tears to rise to my eyes and moisten my cheeks. I lay still and watched her so anxiously that one might almost have thought the mere ardour of my gaze ought to have disturbed her repose. Still she slumbered on blissfully. Oh, why would not she wake when I was so very very thirsty !

Suddenly I heard a door open at the other end of the room, and, on looking round, saw a woman enter whose dress showed her to belong to some Sisterhood. I had never thought well of Sisters in my life. They always had seemed to me to be useless, so eccentric as to be well-nigh mad, and—though otherwise harmless—yet objectionable on the ground that their mere existence conveyed a continual tacit reproach and assumption of superiority to more self-indulgent mortals, who shrank from the strictness and hardness which the Sisters imposed upon themselves voluntarily. Hence the fact of the new-comer's wearing a Sister's habit sufficed to prejudice me against her; and on an ordinary occasion I should not have spoken to—far less asked a favour of—her.

But the present was *not* an ordinary occasion.

All I cared for was to have the thirst that tormented me relieved with the least possible delay ; and no sooner did I see her than I made a frantic effort to call out loud enough for her to hear. The cry, feeble as it was, reached her ears ; and as she was not sure from which bed it proceeded, she advanced slowly up the room, saying, in a low voice, "Who called me ?"

I held up my hand to show it was I who had summoned her ; she came straight to the bedside and asked what I wanted. "Drink!" I gasped, with some difficulty ; for my throat was so dry that I could scarcely articulate the word intelligibly.

With one hand she took up the coveted draught, and, putting the other arm under my pillow, raised me to exactly the right height at which I could drink comfortably, and then held the glass to my lips. Never was nectar more delicious and refreshing than that lemonade tasted to me! When I had drained the last drop I begged eagerly for more, and she quickly replenished the tumbler from a jug on the table, and again gave me the liquid for which I craved. At last my burning thirst was quenched, and when she had gently restored me to my former position in the bed, I could not help feeling beholden to her, notwithstanding that it was a shock to my previous notions to think a

Sister could be useful, and notwithstanding, also, that one never altogether relishes the upsetting of any of one's preconceived cherished ideas.

I could speak better now, so I said: "Thank you. I am sorry to have troubled you, but I was so dreadfully thirsty, and the glass was out of my reach."

"No trouble," she replied kindly; "the only object of my being here is to help people if I can. But why didn't you call to the nurse in charge of this ward? She would have attended to you at once."

"I did call to her more than half an hour ago by the clock," I replied, "but I couldn't call loud enough to wake her."

In consequence of my having drawn the Sister's attention to myself directly she entered the room, she had not yet noticed that the nurse was asleep. Now, however, she perceived it. A look of displeasure came over her face, and she at once proceeded to wake the sleeper, who was evidently much disconcerted at having been caught napping, and started up with a great pretence of liveliness when she saw the Sister standing by her.

"This is against all rules, Nurse Mary, as you know very well," said the Sister; "it is a serious offence for a nurse to sleep when on duty, and I shall have to report you."

"I knew it was very wrong, Sister, and I'm quite shocked that I should have been so careless," replied the culprit. "But indeed you mustn't think as there's any harm done. It was only five minutes back as I was going about, and seeing as every one was all right; and then I sat down and dropped off into a bit of a doze somehow. I wasn't reg'larly asleep—only dozing so light that I should have heard d'rectly if any one made a sound."

"Don't make your fault worse by falsehood," said the Sister severely; "I found the woman over there," pointing to me, "in great want of something to drink; and she told me she had been thirsty for a long time, and unable to wake you when she tried. You must attend to your duty better than this. If I find you asleep again when I visit your ward, you must expect to be dismissed."

The Sister continued her rounds through the hospital to see that everything was right; and as soon as she was gone the nurse came towards me. I regarded her approach with awe. I saw by her face that she did not feel particularly amiable towards the individual who had been the means—however innocent—of procuring her a wiggling; and as a nurse has it in her power to make a patient very miserable if she chooses, I was

naturally dismayed at having been so unlucky as to get into her black books. The desire which I felt at that moment to ingratiate myself with her, if possible, was quite degrading ; and when she rebuked me sharply for having got part of one arm uncovered, and told me not to do so again, I promised obedience with the most servile meekness, though I was quite sure that there was no real harm whatever in what I had done. My bed-clothes were as tidy as need be ; but she pretended to think they wanted straightening, and twitched them about in a vigorous and jerky manner which was not comfortable, and kept me alarmed all the time lest I should be hurt. When she had completed this unnecessary process, she left me alone, to my great relief, and nothing short of the extremest necessity would have induced me to recall her to my bed. I felt frightened, helpless, and in the power of a person who had taken a dislike to me ; and the only comfort I had was to think that the Sister's protecting influence would perhaps save me from anything more serious than petty annoyances. But even petty annoyances are bad enough in all conscience when one is as sick, weak, and miserable as I was then.

CHAPTER XI.

IN HOSPITAL.

Certainly nursing is very far superior, now-a-days, to what it was in the *régime* of the untrained Sairey Gamp confraternity ; but while gladly recognising that fact, I am inclined to think that there is still some room for improvement. For one thing, I doubt whether any particular care is taken to impress upon nurses the important fact that no two human beings are exactly the same ; and that people's characteristic peculiarities are never in greater need of being studied and humoured, than when pain and sickness have weakened the will and rendered the nerves unwontedly sensitive and irritable. If this were insisted upon as it might be in the training of nurses, I do not imagine it would be as common as it is to find them performing their duties mechanically, and apparently regarding patients as machines to be wound up, regulated, and treated according to fixed principles applying to all alike,

instead of as living men and women, possessing widely-differing peculiarities of both mind and body. I think that one or two of my own experiences whilst at the hospital will show that there is some reason for this criticism.

The prolonged thirst from which I had suffered, and the exertion involved in my endeavour to relieve it, fatigued me greatly in my enfeebled condition. Then came the mental wear and tear of terror which I underwent during Nurse Mary's alarmingly vigorous bedclothes-straightening process; and thus, what with one thing and another, by the time she left me to myself again I felt completely worn out, and anxious for nothing so much as sleep. In vain, however, did I try to compose myself to slumber. I was feverish; I ached all over; and, turn which way I would, I could get no ease. Each new position that I tried seemed more uncomfortable than the last; and though the cradle in which my broken leg was fixed prevented me from moving far, yet within the narrow space to which I was thus restricted, I kept shifting my place, and twisting to and fro incessantly.

Of course this restlessness was by no means conducive to my welfare; and when the doctor visited me in the morning he pronounced me to

be in a very exhausted state, and said I was to have nourishment and stimulants every two hours.

I cannot say that I took kindly to the idea of being stuffed like this ; for I was so far from being hungry that my gorge rose at the mere thought of food. And when the nurse who had succeeded Nurse Mary in charge of the ward came up to me with a cup of broth in her hand, I had about the same amount of inclination for it that fair Rosamond may be supposed to have had for the potion presented to her by Queen Eleanor.

But I had fully made up my mind to get well as soon as possible, and had the sense to know that I certainly could not recover without eating, so I struggled to overcome the internal rising of which I was conscious. Perhaps, too, the broth would tempt my appetite, so that after I had got down a mouthful or so, I should find the aversion to food pass away, and be able to go on eating easily. And thus resolved to do my best to obey the doctor's orders, I took a sip out of the cup.

But the first taste was a shock to me. It was not in the least like what I expected, somehow, though I was not just then clear-headed enough to discover immediately what was wrong with it. I did not believe it was broth at all ; at all events, if it was, it was the nastiest that I had ever tasted

in my life. I could hardly swallow even the small quantity I had taken ; and as for getting down any more of it—pah ! the thing was impossible. My loathing for food became more violent than ever, and I pushed away the cup feebly, saying : “Take the nasty stuff away ! I *can’t* eat it ; and it’ll only make me sick to try.”

“Nasty indeed !” returned the nurse ; “why, what better would you have than beautiful chicken-broth like this ? You can drink it well enough if you like ; it’s only your fancy as you can’t.”

“I don’t think it beautiful at all,” replied I ; “indeed, indeed, it’s nasty. Do pray let me alone ; perhaps I shall be hungrier by and by.”

“Rubbish !” she answered, again advancing the cup towards me ; “its the doctor’s orders for you to be fed, and fed you shall be—even if I have to drench you. Come now ; down with it !”

At this moment, when I was ruefully contemplating the broth and wondering if it would be anyhow possible for me to gulp it down, the Sister whom I had seen in the night came into the room. She was general superintendant of the nursing all through the hospital, and had a keen eye for anything amiss. My unhappy look at once attracted her attention, and she came to us and asked the nurse what she was giving me.

"Chicking broth, with a tablespoon of whisky in it, Sister," responded the woman; "that's what the doctor ordered for her. But she's making as much fuss as if it was—I don't know what, and declaring as it'll make her sick."

"I can quite understand your objecting to eat," said the Sister, addressing me gently; "people so often do when they're ill. But it's the beginning is the great difficulty with them, and after that they generally get on much better; I daresay you'll find it so if you try. Or is broth a thing to which you have any special dislike? and do you think you would fancy some other kind of food more?"

"No; I like broth well enough in general," answered I, "and I *have* tried to eat what the nurse brought me. But I couldn't, indeed—it is too nasty."

"Well, suppose I see if *I* can find anything the matter with it," she said, taking the cup from the nurse. "Why! did you ask to have it cold?"

"No," replied I.

"Did the doctor say it was to be given cold?" she inquired, turning to the nurse.

"He didn't say nothing one way or other," answered the latter; "and as I had a jugful cold, ready by me, I just took and poured some into the cup to give as it was—not thinking as it mattered."

"Oh, but it does matter, very much" returned the Sister; "broth is far nicer hot than cold. Go and warm this, and then see if the patient doesn't find it easier to get down. And don't forget in future that broth should always be given hot, unless there are special orders to the contrary."

Now surely the woman might have known that of herself, if she had taken the trouble to think for a moment, and might have perceived that cold chicken broth, with whisky in it, was a thing that no ordinary human palate could be expected to relish. But no; the doctor had not specified it was to be hot; she had some cold to hand; the question of trying to make it palatable never entered her head; and therefore, though the warming would have been but very little trouble, she just brought it me as it was. In that condition I doubt whether I could possibly have eaten it; when warmed, however, I was able to get through the requisite portion—though even then not without considerable difficulty, in consequence of my aversion to food of any kind.

Thus a second time was the conviction forced upon me that the existence in the world of Sisters might perhaps not be so altogether devoid of utility as I had previously imagined.

I daresay the food did me good; but yet it did

not procure me the rest for which I craved, and I had to endure hours more of miserable tossing about before my weary body at last hit upon the posture which would best accommodate its numerous aches and bruises. With a sigh of satisfaction I gave myself up to repose, intending not to stir hand or foot as long as I remained comfortable, lest, if I once lost the position which had been so hard to find, I might not again succeed in discovering it. Soon a delicious sense of drowsiness stole over me, and I was on the point of falling sound asleep, when I was aroused by the voice of a nurse, telling me it was time to feed again. If my repugnance to eating had made all the previous feeding-times during the day objectionable to me, it may be imagined that the present summons was doubly odious, coming at the very moment when I could not bear the idea of stirring so much as a hair's-breadth from where I lay, and would have given the world to be left in peace. Dismayed at the prospect of immediate movement, and loath to be parted from the long-sought rest which I had at length attained, I appealed for a reprieve—however brief. I was so *very* tired of being uncomfortable, I said. I had had such a weary tossing about all night and all day till now. And now that I had at last found some

comfort, might not I stay as I was for just five minutes more?

But the nurse would not hear of such a thing. The doctor's orders, she said, were for me to have food every two hours. The last time had been at 1.25—there it was marked on the slate by the bed—and now it was 3.25. Her business was to obey the doctor's orders exactly; and I must just take what she had brought me that instant, and make no more fuss about it.

So my appeal was disregarded, and I was, then and there, ruthlessly routed up to be fed. And as my nervous system was by no means robust enough at that moment to bear the shock of any abrupt disturbance, I immediately afterwards relapsed into the same state of miserable, feverish restlessness as before.

Now, though it seems unreasonable to blame any one for strict obedience to orders, yet I think in a case like this the woman might well have departed from them so far as to grant the five minutes delay for which I pleaded. It would have softened the blow to have time to make up my mind gradually to the moving which I dreaded; and I think her own sense might have told her that I was in a condition when rest was essential, and when everything unpleasant should be smoothed

over to me as much as possible. But though she was not wilfully harsh or unkind, yet the advisability of making small concessions to an invalid's weakness—fancifulness, as *she* called it—never entered her head. All she thought of was that she was there to carry out the doctor's orders, and that provided they were obeyed to the letter, come what might, she would have nothing to reproach herself with. As for the idea of there being any special necessity for a nurse to be quick in reading, understanding, and making allowances for the fancies, infirmities, and idiosyncracies of human nature, because she is professionally brought into constant contact with it when in its greatest need of sympathy—why, I do not suppose such a notion had ever occurred to her. But might it not have formed a part of her professional education ?

I hope that my criticisms will not be misunderstood. If I venture to point out defects which seem to me remediable, it does not therefore follow that I fail to do justice to the enormous benefits which we derive from trained nurses. On the contrary, when I look back upon my sojourn at the hospital, I feel grateful for and astonished at the punctilious care and attention which was shown towards a mere friendless, helpless, unknown nobody such as I was, from whom no return

could be expected. It may be that I have known nurses act hastily under provocation; that I think them apt to be hard, because too mechanical; and that I doubt whether they always bring their brains to bear as much as might be on the performance of their duty. But none the less do I believe that they are, as a body, a thoroughly conscientious, well-meaning, and valuable set of women; and that a nurse who behaves with deliberate cruelty, or wantonly neglects a patient, is hardly ever to be met with.

In speaking well, however, of the hospital attendants and the treatment I received from them, I must except Nurse Mary. She was a careless, good-for-nothing nurse, unfit for her post, constantly asleep on duty, bad tempered to the patients, and quite regardless of truth in what she said. I was unfortunate enough to be an especial object of her animosity, because she had been reprimanded and fined for her neglect of me and false excuses on the night when I had first become acquainted with her. As it had been on account of me that she had got into hot water, she took a dislike to me then and there, and took advantage of our relative positions to make me feel her displeasure. A nurse has plenty of opportunities for thwarting, bullying, and inflicting small miseries

on a patient ; and Nurse Mary always availed herself of these opportunities as freely as she dared. Whatever she had to do for me was sure to be done as roughly and disagreeably as possible, and I looked forward with dread to the periods when the ward I inhabited was under her charge.

Unluckily for me, it was on one of these occasions that it fell to my lot to have to take a dose of castor oil. Now, that is a physic to which I have always had an intense antipathy. The mere smell of it makes me feel qualmy, even at the best of times ; and it stood to reason that I should dislike it ten times more when my stomach was in an unusually squeamish condition, so that I found it difficult to eat even food that I liked. Hence I looked forward to the impending dose with much trepidation, and reflected anxiously on the probability of my being unable to keep down the nauseous stuff, even when swallowed. It would evidently be a help to avoid having the nasty smell beforehand if possible, as I knew that would make me feel poorly to start with ; so I asked Nurse Mary if she would mind pouring out the oil at some distance off, and not bringing it to my bedside till all ready to be taken.

She refused roughly, saying she had no time to be bothered with all kinds of fads and whims like

that ; and, instead of trying to spare me any preliminary unpleasantness, she measured out the dose quite close to my nose, so as to give me a full benefit of the odour. It seemed to me, too, that she was purposely slow in her proceedings, and kept the bottle uncorked for a most needless length of time—but that may possibly have only been my excited fancy.

The oil having been poured into a glass with water in it, I was sat up in bed, the glass was put into my hands, and I raised it towards my mouth. Being already qualmy from the effect of the smell, and very nervous lest I should be actually sick, I was altogether in an unsteady condition ; and just before the glass had touched my lips, an involuntary convulsive shiver of disgust that came over me made me for the moment unable to control my muscles. My shaky hand lost its grasp of the glass, which toppled over, and spilled all the contents over me and the bed.

The nurse was as indignant at this catastrophe as if I had done it on purpose. She had not the least pity for the horrible plight I was in, nor did it seem to occur to her how improbable it was for any human being to bring him or herself into such a state willingly. “ Troublesome, mischievous, awkward, careless, stupid,” were the kindest and

least offensive words she uttered whilst preparing a fresh jorum of oil. As for me, I simply endured existence in silent misery as best I could whilst the second dose was being got ready. All I wanted was to take that, and get it over as quickly as possible, so that everything which the filthy oil had contaminated might be removed, and I might be washed, and made sweet, dry, and comfortable again.

When the draught was presented to me, I made a heroic effort, flung it down my throat, and returned the empty glass, murmuring faintly : "Oh please, *do* make haste to rid me of all this mess!" But what was my dismay to find that she had no intention of doing anything of the kind ! Since I had chosen to spill the oil, she said, I might just stop in it and see how I liked it ; and perhaps that would teach me not to play tricks of that kind again. What ? fetch a clean night-dress and sheet, and a sponge to wipe my face and chest ! Not she, indeed ! She had plenty of other work to do without extras of that kind ; and she had not time to stop worritting with me any longer—I had delayed her quite long enough, as it was. So saying, she coolly walked away, and left me helpless in a sort of castor-oil purgatory.

My misery may be imagined. The cold, clammy,

wet linen chilled me ; every movement risked bringing me in fresh contact with the loathsome stuff, which I could not touch without a shudder ; and the surrounding air was impregnated with its abominable smell. I would have done anything to escape ; and if my leg had not been fixed in the cradle, I believe I should have rolled out of bed on to the floor, and as far away as I could go from the hateful spot. But I was powerless to do that, or to lessen my wretchedness by any other means ; for I was not strong enough even to pull off my night-dress unaided, nor yet to fold back the wet part of the sheet, and shove it away to the far end of the bed.

Nor was this all I had to suffer ; for the smell made my qualminess increase every minute, and I foresaw with dismay that being sick would probably involve a repetition of the dose.

Oh, why could not I escape from this abominable odour ? and could I anyhow manage to avoid the consequences with which it threatened me ? I remembered having heard it said that sickness may sometimes be checked by a strong effort of will. Let me see if mine would help me in this emergency. I told myself resolutely that the unpleasant sensations which I felt were purely imaginary, and that I need not give way to them

unless I chose. And then I tried to turn my mind to various agreeable and interesting subjects, such as Kitty ; Mrs. Torwood's dogs ; my plan for being revenged on my stepmother, and how I would complete it as soon as I was well again ;— anything under the sun to take my thoughts off from this beastly oil ! But it was no use. The qualmy sensation forced itself to the front in spite of all I could do ; I felt that the dreaded climax was a mere matter of time, and lay awaiting it in terror with my eyes shut. Suddenly I heard some one say : “ What a smell of castor oil ! Where does it come from ? ”

The speaker's nose naturally answered this question, and on opening my eyes I saw the good Sister approaching me. This sight gave me a ray of hope that I might still be saved, and she seemed to me to be a very guardian angel. Never would I have believed that the quaint dress which I had often laughed at and considered ugly, obtrusive, and absurd, could have appeared to my eyes so lovely and acceptable as it did at that moment !

She perceived at a glance that the case was urgent, and went to work to relieve me without an instant's delay. Instead of stopping to ask questions (which would have been a needless prolongation of my sufferings) as to how I came to

be in such an oily plight, she immediately despatched the nurse to fetch clean things, and herself brought some strong aromatic vinegar and held it to my nose. This neutralised the smell of the oil, revived me, and enabled me to conquer the feeling of nausea. Her timely aid averted the catastrophe I had been dreading, and in a wonderfully short space I enjoyed the felicity of feeling myself purified, and restored to a dry, sweet, and comfortable condition. Not till this had been accomplished did she seem to think of anything else. But then she proceeded to inquire how I had come to be in the state in which she had found me, and to take the nurse to task for having left me so.

The delinquent tried to excuse herself by saying that she had been so exceedingly busy that she had had no choice about leaving me to go and attend to some one else. Besides that, she added spitefully, the accident had been all my own doing, for I had deliberately upset the glass out of mischief.

I was commencing an indignant denial of this falsehood when the Sister interrupted me. She said it was quite immaterial whether the glass had been overturned by accident or not, as there were *no* circumstances which could justify a nurse for letting a patient remain an instant longer than could be

helped in such a state as I had been in—all in a mess, and in wet things that might cause a chill. The alleged press of business was no excuse either; for all the nurses knew perfectly well that they were to ask for assistance if they had too much to do, but were on no account to neglect a patient. She was extremely displeased at Nurse Mary's conduct, and proceeded to rebuke her sharply.

Considering the barbarity with which that nurse had just been behaving to me, it will not be wondered at that to hear her being scolded gave me a sensation of acute satisfaction.

But my gratification was speedily diminished as I recollect that she would probably object to me more than ever, now that I had again been the unlucky means of getting her into a scrape. I was filled with alarm at the idea. If she had bullied me hitherto, what was she likely to do in the future? And what chance had I of defending myself from her malice? I would confide my troubles to the Sister who had already befriended me so often, and ask her to take care of me, I thought. Only I must mind not to let the nurse suspect that I was complaining of her, or she would be still angrier than before with me. I would wait till her turn of duty was over, and some other nurse had taken her place.

After the next change of nurses, therefore, I watched anxiously for the Sister to appear in our ward. At last she arrived there, and I made signs to her to come to my bedside. Then, whispering in a very low voice, so that no one else should hear and report what I said to my enemy, I begged her to protect me from Nurse Mary, who hated me, and treated me so badly that I was afraid of her.

"In what way, and on what occasions, have you been treated badly?" asked the Sister.

It was a most natural question to ask, but it was one that I was puzzled to answer satisfactorily. Though perfectly convinced that I needed to be defended, yet when I began recalling to mind (in order to tell the Sister) the numerous trifling persecutions to which I had been subjected, I found it was by no means easy to discover any grievance that seemed important and tangible enough to take hold of and bring forward in support of my assertions, except the recent castor oil affair, and that she knew of already. I could not recollect anything else that seemed worth erecting into a formal accusation, so I only answered that I could not think of any particular case to mention just then, but that indeed what I had said was true, that the nurse was unkind to me always, and that I was afraid to see her come near me.

"Oh, if that is all," replied the Sister kindly, "I should hope your fears have no real foundation; probably you have taken into your head one of those prejudices that people are very apt to have when they are ill; you must try and get over it, instead of indulging it. But, in any case, you may be sure that I am looking after you, and will see that no one hurts you, so don't alarm yourself about it."

Though she spoke cheerfully and pleasantly, yet still I did not consider my complaint had met with a very encouraging reception; and I was desperately afraid that what I had said would be altogether forgotten, and I should be no better off than before. But she was a person who never turned a deaf ear to any cry for help; and I soon saw that my appeal had not passed unheeded, and that—whether she believed me to be mistaken or not—from that time forth her protecting wing overshadowed me with especial closeness (yet not so ostensibly as to make the fact generally conspicuous) when my enemy was in command of the ward. Not only did the Sister take to coming in and out with extra frequency at these times, but I could perceive also that I was then sure to receive a larger share of her attention than I did on other occasions. And as this kindly, unobtrusive, vigil-

ance made it impossible for me to be made to suffer seriously without her discovering it, my peace of mind was gradually restored.

Thus, thanks to the restraining presence of the Sister, Nurse Mary could not make me as miserable as she would evidently have liked to do ; but I know very well that I should have been sadly at her mercy if the Sister had *not* been there to look after me, for to appeal to the doctor would almost certainly have been worse than useless. I have known people rash enough to do that when they were dissatisfied with their nurses, and the result of their appeals was invariably the same. That is to say, the patient was pooh-poohed with more or less politeness, according to the disposition of the doctor ; no attempt was made to investigate the truth of the complaint, and things went on exactly as before, except that the nurses certainly did not increase in amiability towards the individuals who had presumed to find fault with them.

I must say, I think it would be in the interests of the sick, if, in both private and public cases, the doctors would beware of the blind confidence which they, as a rule, are inclined to repose in nurses. My experience is, that if a patient complains of his nurse to the doctor for neglect, roughness, or any other fault, she is apt either to relate what

took place so as make it appear that she could not possibly have acted otherwise than she did ; or else to deny the charge absolutely ; or else to say, with affected compassion, that the poor fellow sometimes wanders in his mind and does not know things rightly, so that it is useless to think of attending to all he says. And the doctor invariably accepts her version as the true one, and takes it for granted that she is all right, and there is no necessity for his interference.

That a doctor should trust much to a nurse is only natural, seeing that there are cases in illness where as much depends upon her as upon him—perhaps even more. But her importance does not make her infallible ; and though it is all very well to have confidence in her, yet it is carrying confidence to excess to make it a rule *always* to think her word better than that of her patient. If a sick person's account of his symptoms differed materially from that given by the nurse, I suppose the doctor would hardly think it wise totally to ignore what had been told him by the former, and to act solely upon the information received from the latter. And ought not the same rule to apply to other statements also ?

CHAPTER XII.

SISTER HELENA.

MY progress towards restored health was but slow; and poor I—an individual who had always regarded with mortal aversion confinement and monotony in every shape—was forced to undergo the tedium of a protracted illness and convalescence. Terribly weary did I get of the long days and nights as they dragged on without bringing anything to amuse me, and to enliven the dulness of existence. Other patients had friends and acquaintances who came to see them on visiting days, but I had not even that mild excitement to look forward to, for I was utterly solitary and unknown. Unluckily, too, the literary resources of the place were but limited. For though there was a so-called library yet its stock of books was lamentably small, and, as it seemed to me, uninteresting. And though odd numbers of old magazines and newspapers would drop in upon us at intervals, yet their appearance was nothing like as regular and fre-

quent as I should have liked, or as I think it would have been if benevolently disposed people had realised what a boon it is to many hospital patients to know something of what goes on in the outside world from which they are excluded.

My mind, then, having but few distractions, was all the more ready to occupy itself with whatever person or thing happened to come prominently before it. And thus I found myself continually engaged in studying and thinking about the Sister, who, for the time being, filled a position of conspicuous importance in my life, as a sort of guardian angel in whom I felt a serene confidence that she would see I was never seriously wronged or ill-used in any way.

She was the first Sister with whom I had ever come in contact, and, by my acquaintance with her, the prejudice I had previously entertained against all sisters was speedily swept away. Sister Helena, as she was called, must, I think, have been between thirty and thirty-five years old, and was tall and graceful in figure. She had handsome features; a high broad forehead; a keen eye that seemed to notice everything within its range; a square chin, and a firm mouth; and no one who saw her could doubt that she possessed both power and intelligence above the average. Her face was

pale, and her expression—except when she smiled—grave to the verge of austerity. But it was the gravity of thoughtfulness, not of gloom and sadness ; and whatever tendency to austerity she may have had was reserved exclusively for herself. Most certainly it was never visible in her behaviour to the sick ; for she always showed them the kindest sympathy and tenderness, devoting herself to them absolutely, and treating them with a loving gentleness and tenderness that was enough to make one suppose they were her dearest friends.

As she was general superintendent of the hospital-nursing and arrangements for the relief of the sick, she had usually too much to do with looking after her subordinates and seeing that they did their duty, to be able to officiate in person as nurse. But she was thoroughly capable of doing so in case of need, and whenever circumstances happened to make it necessary for her to bandage, sew up, or dress wounds, or perform any other services of the kind for patients, she was sure to do whatever was required as gently, skilfully, and efficiently as any one—or indeed more so.

One very marked distinction between her and the ordinary professional nurses was, that she was unmistakably a lady by birth, and possessed naturally—with effort or thinking about it—the

subtle charm of refinement. I—who had fondly imagined myself to be superior to the influence of any sentimental vanity of that kind—was astonished and disappointed to find how quickly I detected this in her, and how attractive it was to me. I could not disguise from myself that I was highly susceptible to the charm to which I had believed I was indifferent; and that it was infinitely preferable to me to have to do with the person in whom I instinctively recognised an equal than with those who were inferiors. Refined associates were more congenial to me than vulgar ones, in spite of all my knocking about; and even though provoked at my own folly, I sometimes could not repress a sigh to think that I had left my own rank of life in favour of a lower one.

Well ; the more I observed and thought about Sister Helena, the more did I wonder what her previous history could have been. Here was a woman, evidently well born and bred, good-looking, below middle age, clever, amiable, sensible, capable, and in every way qualified to make her mark and be popular in society. Why on earth, then, should she be spending her existence in hard work amongst the painful sights and scenes of a hospital, instead of enjoying herself in the sphere to which she belonged naturally ? For the fact that she *was* at

the hospital I was profoundly thankful, because I was myself a gainer by it ; but none the less was it an inexplicable mystery to me, and one which I was constantly endeavouring to find plausible theories to account for.

As, therefore, I was intensely curious about her, admired, liked, and was grateful to her, and through her could enjoy the, to me, pleasant feeling of association with a cultivated and refined lady, it followed naturally that I sought eagerly for opportunities of having to do with her, and never failed to profit by any excuse for making her occupy herself about me. The pleasure her company gave me was too evident to escape her quick observation, and when she perceived it her kindness of heart prompted her to gratify my wishes as far as might be; for she was one of those to whom nobody ever held out their hands in vain. Therefore, though her multifarious avocations made it impossible, as a rule, for her to bestow much individual attention on any particular person whose case was not so critical and special as to give it precedence over ordinary business, yet she would always—unless in a *very* great hurry—stop and say a kind word to me in passing through the ward ; and sometimes, on the rare occasions when she had a few minutes to spare, she would even

come in on purpose to chat with me. I do not know whether or not she had the same intuitive consciousness that I had of our both belonging to the same social order; but, at all events, there sprung up between us by degrees an intimacy beyond that which is ordinarily produced by the relations of nurse and patient.

As it was not in her nature to see any kind of suffering without trying to relieve it, she tried to hit upon some means of varying the unchanging sameness of life by which she perceived me to be oppressed. It was not possible to do much for me in this way whilst I was tied by the leg in bed, but when at last I was able to get up and crawl about a little with the help of sticks, she asked me if I thought I could get as far as her room, which was on the same floor as the ward, and only a short distance from it. On my replying in the affirmative, she filled me with delight by inviting me to go and have tea there with her that afternoon. Oh how impatiently I counted the minutes till tea-time came! and how welcome and refreshing was the change to her room from the dreary old ward of which I was so tired!

From that date our intimacy advanced much more rapidly than before; for, as she saw how I enjoyed the visit to her room, hardly a day passed

on which I was not invited there at some time or other. It was not often that she was able to be with me all the time, for she was almost always called off elsewhere on business. But when this happened she did not expect me to go back to the ward unless I chose, and if I preferred—as I invariably did—to stay where I was, and amuse myself with books, work, or my own thoughts whilst awaiting her return, I was at liberty to do so. Indeed, if she had not been willing to trust me in her room without her, it would generally not have been worth while my going there at all ; for the demands upon her time were perpetual, and she hardly ever had any leisure. It was Sister here and Sister there from morning till night ; and, as far as I could see, she had not a single minute in the day which she could call her own, and reckon on as secure from interruption.

I have already said that one object which I had had for desiring to know her was, that I wanted to learn her past history, wherein I believed must lie some mysterious reason which had caused her to adopt her present hard, untempting, self-denying life. But as our acquaintance progressed and I came to know her more and more, I perceived with surprise that there was no hidden mystery at all about the matter, and that instead of any thrill-

ing romance or tragedy such as I had imagined, the reason for her life was simply the love of God, and desire to serve Him in the best way she could. That was the sole motive for every deed, word, and thought of hers—the one compass by which her course was steered.

The reason why this discovery amazed me as it did was, that I had never dreamt of its being possible for any one with respectable mental abilities to take religion thus *au grand sérieux*. I cannot say I had ever troubled my head much about religion at all; but still I had a vague idea of it as a thing which people of weak intellect sometimes made a fuss about, but which the wiser part of the world treated as a mere unreal conventionality—a sort of outer garment which was assumed and respected solely out of deference to Mrs. Grundy.

It was startling to me, therefore, to meet with such a living contradiction of this idea as Sister Helena. She was no fool, as I knew, but very much the reverse; and in her management of the hospital she gave daily proofs of good sense, shrewdness, and sound judgment, which made it impossible to think she would be led away by visionary notions, or act lightly and without due consideration. Nor was she a person who ever

bestowed a thought upon Mrs. Grundy, or who could be suspected of any taint of humbug and unreality in either word or deed. Yet to this sensible, intelligent, absolutely honest woman, religion was a fact of such vital importance as to be the mainspring of her life—the one thing to be put before everything else! So extraordinary did it seem to me, that I should certainly have refused to believe in the phenomenon at all if I had not beheld it with my own eyes.

It appeared evident to me that it must need a very powerful engine to be the motive force of such steady, self-sacrificing, practical goodness as hers, and I thought I should like to understand somewhat of the nature of that engine. With this object in view I directed constant questions towards the subject that interested me, and thus it came about that religion was the theme upon which we conversed more frequently than any other. I do not recapitulate our conversations, because I consider they would be out of place in a book of this kind; but this much I will say, that they made a strong impression on me, and caused me to think of religion very differently from what I had done hitherto. She was the first person I had ever met whose deeds really harmonised with her professions, and all that she said had weight with me,

because her life was an unmistakable proof that she honestly and fully did believe the things she professed to believe. I began to contemplate the possibility of there being a real meaning in the creeds and prayers which I had often heard and joined in when at church without attaching any sense at all to them. I began, too, to have an idea that perhaps church membership might be something more than a mere empty form, and that there might be some real advantage in belonging to that Church of which I had been a member all my life as a matter of course, and without ever supposing it could make the slightest difference to me, one way or other. And, more than all, in proportion as I became inclined to believe in the truth and reality of religion, so also did the conviction grow upon me that I myself was not exactly altogether what I should be, and that it behoved me to set about reforming.

I really did want to amend what was amiss, and to become better than I was; but still I did not want to be *too* good. Such goodness as Sister Helena's, for instance, was, I knew, far beyond my powers; and besides that, my hearty admiration for it in her did not lead me to desire it for myself, because I was quite sure that even if it were possible for me to attain to such a pitch of self-

denying excellence, I should not enjoy it, as I was a deal too fond of worldly comforts and joys ever to be happy without them.

Certainly it was very singular that there should be so wide a difference between one person's sense of duty and another's. When first this difference struck me, I was inclined to be somewhat uneasy at the comparatively diminutive proportions of my own virtue; but then there occurred to me a very comfortable and reassuring way of accounting for it. People's bodies were predisposed towards measles, whooping cough, and other illnesses in varying degrees, and had them lightly or severely according to the extent of that predisposition; and some people even never had these illnesses at all—being apparently endowed with some constitutional peculiarity which acted as an antidote to the poison of disease. And from this I argued that probably people's minds varied in a similar fashion in regard to virtue—some being more, and some less receptive of it. I supposed that a person could only be affected by religion and goodness according to the degree of his mental predisposition towards such things, and that some people could never be influenced by them at all. I thought this supposition a perfectly reasonable one, and highly satisfactory also. For in that case it was

obviously absurd to expect much goodness from a person whose mind was so constituted as to be antagonistic to virtuous influences ; and of course no one could be blamed for what was merely a natural defect.

I propounded my theory triumphantly to Sister Helena one day when she was insisting upon the necessity of some virtue or other which I thought ordinary mortals need not trouble themselves about. But she refused absolutely to agree with me ; declared that goodness was equally attainable by all who chose ; and laughed at the idea of people having a natural liability towards or against it, like they might have towards or against a fever.

“All very well for you to talk,” answered I ; “but I should like to know how else it’s to be accounted for that some people should be so much better than others as to become sisters, monks, and nuns, and all that sort of thing ? I’m sure it must need a very special and uncommon predisposition towards goodness to make any one give up every mortal thing that can make them happy —as they do !”

“Not at all,” she replied quickly ; “you’ll find good and earnest people in the world, just as much as in convents. It’s a question of vocation—not

of superior goodness. Some people have such a natural inclination for a conventional life that they are happier there than they would be in the world ; and some people, on the other hand, are happier in the world. Each set seeks happiness in its own way. And for any one to join a religious community without having a real vocation for it is a very great mistake, and not a good or desirable thing at all."

" Well, then," said I, " you believe that people are born monks and nuns, just as they are born poets, painters, musicians, or sculptors. *Nascitur non fit.* After all, I don't see that that's so very unlike my predisposition theory."

" Why, there's this great difference," she said smiling ; " according to *you*, some people would have no chance of goodness at all ; and *I* maintain, on the contrary, that every one has an equal chance. Goodness certainly *manifests* itself differently in different individuals ; but you can't argue from that that it *exists* in them in different degrees. Remember that it is no great hardship for a person who doesn't care for society to give it up ; and that you mustn't judge the merit of an action by its effects, but by how much it costs the doer."

And then a knock at the door, and an urgent

request for the Sister to go and see after something or other immediately, terminated our conversation abruptly as usual ; and I remained alone, musing on the fresh proof I had just received of the erroneousness of my original ideas regarding Sisters. Never for an instant had I doubted that they enjoyed—whether legitimately or not—a profound sense of superiority to the general run of humanity ; and now that my old prejudice against them was overcome, I had arrived at the conclusion that, as they really *were* immeasurably better than the rest of the world (judging by Sister Helena), they had a perfect right to pique themselves thereon. Yet, instead of that, Sister Helena had not only refused to acquiesce in my ascription of honour and glory to them, but had argued with evident sincerity to prove that there was no special merit whatever in being a Sister ! If *I* had been one, I should not have thought anything of the sort, I knew very well.

As the spark latent in flint needs a blow to bring it out, so, I suppose, whatever capacity I possessed for faith and virtue must have lain dormant in me till quickened to life by Sister Helena. They are elements which cannot possibly begin to mix actively in any one's existence without producing a commotion in that person's previous ways

of going on, and so I soon found myself sorely troubled in mind respecting my uncompleted project for being revenged upon my step-mother. Up to the present time I had only disquieted her with threatening letters, and had not yet arrived at the finishing touch of making known her humble origin to her husband and her friends. That had necessarily been deferred by my being laid up in hospital ; but I had not given it up for a moment, and had meant that the execution of my threats against her should be one of the first things I would do when I should be able to get about again. In my opinion she richly deserved punishment for the undutifulness to her mother, ingratitude to her step-father, absurd vanity, and bad behaviour in general, of which she had been guilty. And as my own personal enmity for her gave me an especial willingness to be the instrument whereby justice was to overtake her, I looked forward with extreme satisfaction to the completion of my scheme, and regarded it as a most righteous and proper proceeding.

All of a sudden, however, this pleasant prospect was disturbed by my newly awakened conscience insisting on taking a very different view of the matter, and declaring that as forgiveness was a duty and revenge was wrong, therefore I ought to

give up the intention that I was cherishing. I opposed this conviction—struggled, argued, and tried to evade the conclusion that was so distasteful to me. But it was no use; conscience was too strong, and stuck firmly to its point, till I was forced, at last, reluctantly to abandon my beloved scheme.

So far, therefore, virtue was victorious; but its power did not extend far enough to prevent my regretting bitterly that I had not fully accomplished my designs against Lady Trecastle before any new ideas had come to interfere. Since conscience declared positively that I ought to overcome the old grudge which I bore her, I should have to do so; but it would now be a hard matter to accomplish, whereas I was sure that I could have done it sweetly and with hardly any effort at all, if only I had had the satisfaction of feeling that my plan of revenge had been carried out fully. For forgiveness is a duty whose performance is marvellously facilitated by the knowledge that the offender has had to suffer in some way or other for his wrongdoing.

I was quite in earnest about desiring to be true to such light as I had arrived at, and therefore did not exactly wish to return to my previous unenlightened condition. Yet I sighed

as it dawned upon my mind that these new ideas might involve new restraints, and that perhaps henceforth I should be less my own mistress than before.

It would be so much easier to take to religion if it did not seem likely to deprive me of freedom, thought I, ruefully.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CATASTROPHE.

AT last I was pronounced fit to be discharged from the hospital, and on the morrow I was to depart. I was still far from strong enough to think of undertaking any employment involving hard work and exertion ; and how to keep from starving when once more turned adrift to earn my own livelihood was a problem which I should have been puzzled to solve if left to myself. Sister Helena, however, had come to my aid, and procured me a light place as assistant to the owner of a small newspaper-shop, who, on account of advancing years, wanted extra help and was willing to engage me on her recommendation. Thus was added another to the many benefits for which I was already indebted to that excellent woman, whose life was one long series of acts of kindness done, without thought of return, for whoever was in need. No wonder that I had learnt to admire, love, trust, and look up to her as though she had

belonged to some higher order of beings! For she was certainly immeasurably superior to any other of the human race with whom I had ever been acquainted.

My last day, then, in hospital had arrived. The desire to have a farewell talk with the Sister in peace and comfort had made me ask her if she could not manage that we should have a quiet half-hour together for once, without any of the tiresome interruptions by which our conversations were usually cut short. She had said it was impossible for her to promise such a thing certainly, as it must depend on what work had to be done; but that she would do her best to arrange matters as I wished, and if successful would come and fetch me to her room when she was at leisure. All day, therefore, did I hope for the expected summons, and was greatly disappointed as hour after hour passed on without my seeing or hearing anything of her. At last, quite late in the evening, she entered the ward looking unusually fagged, and came and sat down by me.

"I've been so sorry not to be able to come for you as I'd hoped," she said kindly, "but you know business *must* have precedence of everything else, and I was kept so unexpectedly long with one case that all my arrangements were upset. It

was a man who was brought in yesterday with a couple of slight scalp wounds that had to be sewn up, and who didn't seem to have much the matter with him. But twice to-day he got so odd that there was a doubt whether he was not going out of his mind ; and I stayed with him to see whether he was or not. If he had been, and if he had become violent, it would have been an awkward job to manage him, for he's immensely powerful. I never saw any one so extraordinarily sensitive to loud sounds and commotion of any kind as he seems to be. There was an unusually loud noise going on both times when his oddness came on, and as the noise diminished so did he calm down again. I'm sure he has a highly irritable nervous system, which is excited to an almost ungovernable pitch by any fuss, and can then only be pacified by perfect tranquillity."

"Is he all right now ?" I asked.

"Yes, I hope so. The unfavourable symptoms didn't return, and the doctor thought him going on quite satisfactorily. But I stayed with the man a long time, because it was so important for him to be watched attentively whilst we were uncertain about his sanity, that I did not like to leave the responsibility to any one else. Then, when I could trust him to a nurse alone, I had

such an accumulation of work to get through that I've been hard at it ever since, and not had a moment to myself till now ; so you see I had no choice about giving up the quiet talk with you that we had proposed having. I'm on my way back to him now, as I want to hear the nurse's account of him during my absence."

"Humph!" grunted I, feeling that I need not fear saying what I thought, now that I was on the verge of quitting the hospital; "you won't be much the wiser for that, if it's Nurse Mary that's looking after him. If you knew her as well as I do, and knew how sleepy she is, how constantly she neglects her business, and what a wonderful facility she has for inventing false excuses when she's blamed, you'd never believe a word she tells you."

"It wasn't her I left him with, but one of the others," replied the Sister. "To tell you the truth, I should not have trusted such a case as that in her hands alone. For though I don't think quite so badly of her as you do, yet still I am by no means satisfied with her. You are not the only patient who has, either directly or indirectly, intimated she is not what she should be; and I have myself noticed things tending to confirm these complaints."

"Why don't you get rid of her, then, when you yourself allow that you've no confidence in her?" asked I.

The Sister hesitated a moment, and then answered: "Had the matter rested solely with me, I believe I should very likely have done so. But when I told the authorities what I thought of her, the doctor took her part so strongly that nothing came of it. He declared that he saw no reason whatever to be dissatisfied with her; and that sick people were always so fanciful, exacting, and peevish, that it was ridiculous to take any notice of their imaginary grievances. And as he was quite positive of being right, whilst I spoke more from suspicion than actual knowledge of the woman's behaviour, he carried the day. Perhaps it's as well so after all. To dismiss her would very possibly have ruined her professional prospects; and I should never forgive myself if I thought I had been the means of inflicting so severe a penalty on any one without sufficient cause."

"Oh Sister!" exclaimed I, abruptly; "is that the man you were talking of?"

In order to enable my readers to understand what ensued, I must delay my narrative for a moment to explain how we were all placed.

Sister Helena and I were sitting at a table about

the middle of a very long room, having a door at each end, and beds ranged down both sides. In the bed nearest to us was a poor woman who had been badly burnt in an explosion ; and by her side stood the nurse of the ward, employed in changing the dressings of the burns. I was the only patient who was still up and dressed ; the rest were in bed, and one or two of them already asleep. They were all women who had been injured severely in some way or other ; and as I, though well enough to be discharged from the hospital, was still extremely weak after my long illness, it will be seen that Sister Helena and the nurse were the only two able-bodied individuals in the ward.

The cause of the exclamation I had uttered was this. I—who was facing one of the doors towards which the Sister had her back—suddenly saw that door pushed partially open, and a man's head poked in as though for the purpose of reconnoitring. After a hasty survey the owner followed his head quickly into the room, closed the door cautiously behind him, executed a fantastic pirouette, advanced a yard or so in a kind of polka-step, came to a stand-still by a chair near the door, and commenced bowing and smiling with extravagant gestures. On his shoulder he carried an implement used for breaking and piercing ice, which was

rather like a hammer, with a sharp, triangular, steel spike at one end of the head. He was big, broad-shouldered, and muscular; his head was bound up in bandages ; and he was clad in shirt, trousers, and socks. In consequence of having no shoes on, his movements were noiseless ; and this noiselessness considerably enhanced the uncanny and startling effect produced by the sudden appearance amongst us of so strange a figure, demeaning itself in so eccentric a manner.

Sister Helena looked round at my exclamation, and a momentary expression of horror crossed her face, and showed me that my conjecture had been right, and that our visitor was the man of whom she had been speaking. But that one transient look of horror was the only sign of nervousness she gave, and she did not lose her self-possession and composure for an instant. "Yes," she answered me quietly, turning towards the nurse who, as I have said, was employed not far from us. "Nurse!" she said, softly. The woman looked up from her occupation and saw the intruder, whom she at once recognised as the patient whose sanity had been considered doubtful. His present appearance left very little doubt about the matter, and she was naturally filled with consternation at the sight of an armed madman like him in the midst of a lot

of helpless women. Dropping the dressings she had in her hand, she started violently, and was about to break forth into exclamations, when the Sister checked her by continuing in the same low, steady voice :

“ Hush! make no fuss or he’ll get worse. Go for help. As long as you’re in the ward, walk quietly, as if nothing was the matter; and as soon as you’re outside, run as fast as you can. I’ll stay here, and try to prevent his doing any harm till help comes.”

“ Indeed, ’tisn’t safe for you to stay, Sister,” whispered the frightened nurse ; “ he’s raving mad by the looks of him, and goodness only knows what he mayn’t do !”

“ All the more reason some one should stay and take care of the sick,” returned the other. “ Off with you ! mind not to hurry till you’re out of the ward ; and then, the faster you go the better.”

Judging by the nurse’s appearance, I should say it was fortunate for her character for obedience that she was not told to remain in the ward instead of to leave it ; for I am inclined to doubt whether any power on earth would have induced her voluntarily to stay in so unsafe a neighbourhood. As it was, however, her orders exactly corresponded to her inclinations, and she promptly set out towards the door opposite to that near which the

man had taken up his position. He had left off bowing and smiling by this time, and was seated in the chair, leaning forward meditatively and scratching the floor with the point of his weapon, and apparently unconscious of the presence of any one else.

"If he'll stay like that till help comes, we shall do," whispered the Sister to me. "I'm sure he's a man for whom quiet is *everything*; what I dread is any fuss or noise to irritate him. It's lucky all the patients are in bed, so that he doesn't see people moving about."

This was all very well; but then there was no *certainty* of his continuing to stay quiet. And supposing he were to become mischievous, what chance had any of us in the ward of defending ourselves against a powerful, armed madman? So strongly was this borne in upon me that I felt an ignominious desire to get up and follow the retreating nurse, and was only prevented from doing so by my affection for Sister Helena. For some inexplicable reason or other I did not like to go away and leave her in danger, even though I was perfectly aware that I was too feeble to have a chance of being of any assistance if the man *did* become violent. Besides that, I saw how anxious she was to keep everything as quiet as possible;

and perceived also that as the departure of two people would necessarily create more disturbance than that of one, therefore my going away must certainly be contrary to her wishes. On no account would I cause her one atom of additional worry and annoyance ; I could sit still, at least, though there was no other way in which I could help her. So, notwithstanding my state of inward trepidation, I stayed where I was, and hoped that the nurse might be fortunate in meeting with succour speedily.

Unluckily I was not the only person on whom the preservation of tranquillity in the ward depended. The other patients, having heard nothing of the possibility of the presence of a lunatic in the building, had at first had no suspicion of the real state of affairs when they beheld the stranger's entrance. Still, they were uneasy, because what was taking place was evidently altogether unusual ; and what is out of the common is, for that reason alone, presumed to be alarming by the majority of mankind. And they found confirmation for their apprehensions in the ominous haste with which the nurse went out of the ward ; for, in spite of the caution she had received, she made her exit in a manner that was decidedly suggestive of flight.

From one bed after another issued whimperings, timid cries, or eager demands to know what was

the matter; and the murmurs and outcries were rising swiftly to an uproar when they were repressed by the Sister. Speaking loud enough to be heard by all, she said that she would take care of every one there, but that she insisted on strict silence. That sufficed to quell the gathering storm; for there was not a soul in the place but had confidence in Sister Helena.

The noise made, however, had already taken effect on the maniac, and aroused him from his previous meditative condition. Springing up and flourishing the ice-hammer in the air wildly, he mounted upon the seat of the chair in which he had been sitting, and began to speak.

Sister Helena had been hitherto standing quiet in pursuance of her policy of keeping everything as absolutely still as possible. But on seeing his increased excitement, she began to advance gently towards him—moving slowly and apparently carelessly, but getting steadily nearer to him. Forgetting my uselessness and my fear of the man, I rose instinctively to accompany her when she set out; but she motioned me back, saying quickly:

“No; stay quiet. It’s *my* business to protect the patients—not *yours*.”

All this takes time to write down; but in actual fact it occupied very few seconds, and it was still

too soon to look for succour to arrive, unless the nurse's search for it should have been unexpectedly fortunate.

The idea which had seized the madman appeared to be, that he was in the middle of delivering a lecture on anatomy or some subject of that kind ; and he seemed most intent upon the theme which he imagined himself to be pursuing, as he shouted out :

“ And now, ladies and gents, I come to that wonderful horgin—the brain. Wait one moment whilst I get one to show you ; for hillustrations is hindispensible to the lecterer ! ”

With these words, he jumped off the chair, brandishing his weapon, and approached the nearest bed, wherein lay a woman whose leg and ribs had been broken, and whose injured limb was fixed in a cradle. She—perceiving that he had sinister designs upon her—began to scream dismally, and to make unavailing efforts to extricate herself from the bed and try to escape. Her screams were echoed by many of the other patients, who, convinced they were all going to be murdered, and filled with dismay on their own account as well as hers, either forgot or ignored the command which had been given for silence. Sister Helena, rushing forward to the rescue, reached the bedside just in time to interpose herself between the shrieking,

struggling, fear-distraught woman calling piteously for help, and the man who was on the point of attacking her.

"Get out of the way there!" exclaimed he fiercely to the Sister, "or I'll take your brain instead. I'm bound to have one for my lecter!"

"Oh no!" she replied calmly; "the lecture is put off till to-morrow, so you won't want a brain till then."

The tranquillity of her looks and manner seemed to produce an impression on him; for he lowered his weapon, and looked perplexed, and as if doubting whether to believe her or not. If only the other inmates of the ward had obeyed her instructions and kept quiet, I think that even then she would have been able to restrain him. But the clamour they made served to excite him afresh and add fuel to his frenzy.

"Nonsense!" he shouted; "I'm wanted to go hon with the lecter at once. Don't you hear 'em calling me back? If you hinder me, I'll kill you!"

Pushing her aside so roughly that she staggered and nearly fell, he returned to his original victim, whom he caught hold of with one hand, while with the other he raised the hammer to strike. The blow was about to fall when it was arrested by Sister Helena, who recovered her equilibrium in

time to spring back and seize his uplifted arm. Shaking her off as if she had been a feather, he turned upon her with a savage cry, and raised his weapon once more. In another moment it descended, and was buried with all his force in the centre of her forehead. She sunk to the ground with one shuddering groan at the very instant that the nearest door was burst open, and two or three men rushed in. Flinging themselves upon the maniac before he had well realised their presence, they succeeded—after a short furious struggle—in overpowering him and carrying him off. But they were too late, alas, to save the life of the best and noblest human being I have ever known ; for the sharp spike of the ice-hammer had penetrated to her brain, and killed her instantaneously. And so ended the life of one who died as she had lived,—that is to say, devoting herself voluntarily and unreservedly to the good of others. Characteristic of her, also, was the manner of disposal of her body, which was burnt in a crematorium, in accordance with her own frequently expressed wishes on the subject. For it was horrible to her to think that her material part might possibly, after death, be the means of bringing death and sorrow to the fellow-creatures whom she loved so well, by poisoning the air they breathed or the water they drank ;

and, therefore, she had always been a steady upholder of cremation.

When the history of the catastrophe which had caused her untimely end was investigated, it came out that the person in charge of the man when he made his escape had been Nurse Mary after all, and that what had happened was owing to her negligence. The way of it was this: The nurse with whom he had been left, being taken ill suddenly, and thinking that an hour's quiet would put her right again, had had recourse to one of her fellows to replace her whilst she went to lie down, and that other individual had happened to be Nurse Mary. Before going away the nurse who was ill had not neglected to caution her substitute of the special reason that existed for watching the patient carefully, and Nurse Mary had assured her she might be quite easy on that score—which assurance, however, had in no wise prevented her who gave it from acting in her usual manner, and going to sleep when so inclined. Thus, when the man's insanity returned, there was no one to hinder his roaming off wherever the fancy took him. And this was how he came to arrive at our ward, armed with the ice-hammer, which he had happened to see and pick up on the way.

Had Nurse Mary had her deserts and been dismissed from the hospital long before, Sister Helena's life would not have been cut short by the madman. But she was sacrificed, in my opinion, partly to the nurse's inefficiency, and partly to the folly of the doctor, who had refused to believe it possible for patients to have any real cause of complaint against a nurse, and had not hesitated to condemn their assertions as unfounded without inquiry, and had therefore opposed the dismissal of the nurse they had complained of.

Brief as was my acquaintance with Sister Helena, it sufficed to make an indelible impression on my life ; and it is owing to her influence, and to the seed she sowed, that I am no longer the unprincipled, heathen, scampish individual that I was before I knew her—a woman whose life was more in harmony with the Saviour's precept than that of any one else whom I have ever known, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another.”

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHANGE OF FORTUNE.

ON leaving the hospital I straightway entered the situation as assistant newspaper-seller which Sister Helena had procured for me. I did not contemplate staying there long, because, as the work was light, the pay was proportionately small; so as soon as my health should be thoroughly re-established, I meant to give up vending papers, and look out for some more remunerative employment; providing always that it was one which I could obtain honestly, for I was quite determined not to have recourse to any more false testimonials in future. But an undreamt of surprise was in store for me, and all my schemes were destined to be completely altered before I had been many weeks at my new post.

When, as sometimes happened, business was slack, I had nothing to do but to wait idly for customers to appear; and on these occasions I usually beguiled the time by studying some of the

papers which composed our stock in trade. One day whilst thus engaged I was astonished to come across an advertisement commencing thus: “Gilbertina, daughter of the late Sir Anthony Trecastle of Castle Manor—” Having read so far, I put down the paper. The *late* Sir Anthony! Then my father must have died whilst I was in the hospital, for I had heard of him as alive and well shortly before that. He and I had never cared for one another, but notwithstanding this mutual indifference, it gave me a shock to learn thus suddenly that he was dead. So many thoughts and recollections of old days rushed into my mind, that it was some little time before I remembered that I had not yet finished reading the advertisement, and that as it began with my name, I had probably better see what it was all about.

This was how the whole ran:—“Gilbertina, daughter of the late Sir Anthony Trecastle of Castle Manor, is requested to communicate with Messrs. Fox and Snail, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, from whom she will hear of something greatly to her advantage.”

What could Messrs. Fox and Snail, who had been, as I knew, my father’s solicitors, have to tell me, I wondered? and should I answer this advertisement of theirs or not? If I did, I must evidently

surrender the “incog.” which I had hitherto preserved so successfully, and in that case I saw that I could not reckon certainly on being able to resume it again. Therefore the question which I put before myself to be decided upon was this: Am I inclined to take a step which may involve my leaving the independent career on which I am launched, and going back to my original station of life ?

Well ! I had by this time discovered that people who were by birth and education my equals were, as a rule, more congenial associates to me than my inferiors ; I knew, too, that I had an innate and ineradicable prejudice in favour of the name of Trecastle, which would make it pleasant to me once more to call myself by it openly ; for even though I had voluntarily discarded it, yet I had always felt a secret pride in thinking that it was mine, and that I had the right to bear it if I chose. Besides this, my experiences had taught me to appreciate better than formerly the comfort of having my bread and butter found for me, instead of being obliged to find it for myself, and I had learnt that there are sometimes drawbacks attendant upon earning one’s own livelihood, notwithstanding the halo of adventure and enterprise surrounding that process, which constituted its principal attraction in my eyes. Furthermore,

Messrs. Fox and Snail promised to tell me of what would be greatly to my advantage, and it is not in human nature to feel averse to hearing of anything that answers to that description, or to learn that such information is to be had, without being curious to know exactly what it may be. Altogether, therefore, there was clearly a good deal to be said in favour of my complying with the request in the advertisement, and consenting to become Gilbertina Trecastle once more.

But then, on the other hand, it seemed to me that however desirable this course might be in some ways, its advantages would be more than counterbalanced if it involved anything derogatory to my dignity. Upon no account whatever would I condescend to take any step which could be construed into a confession of failure and defeat, or be considered equivalent to taking cap in hand, and suing humbly for reinstatement. No, indeed! I had supported myself by my own exertions ever since I had left home, and saw no reason to doubt my being able to continue to do so. Therefore I had neither failed nor been defeated, and it was not likely that I was going to do anything to give rise to a contrary supposition.

After careful consideration of the advertisement, however, I came to the conclusion that there was

nothing to compromise dignity in responding to such an invitation as it contained, and that I could do so without any fear of injuring my self-respect, or appearing to humiliate myself either in my own eyes, or in those of other people. And, my pride being thus satisfied, I went next day to the office in Lincolns Inn Fields, announced who I was, and inquired what Messrs. Fox and Snail had to tell me.

The information I received in reply was this. Before my father left England, immediately after my mother's death, he made a will and deposited it with his solicitors. He seems to have thought of altering it after his second marriage, for he observed to them casually once, that he should not wonder if he were to make a fresh will some day or other when he had not anything else to do, and happened to be in the humour for it. But whatever his intentions on the subject may have been, that day was still to come when he died suddenly. The only will he left was the one already mentioned, and as in that he bequeathed everything he had to me, it was now only necessary that I should prove my identity in order to enter into possession of my inheritance without further obstacle. I had but little difficulty in establishing satisfactorily that I really was Gilbertina Trecastle,

and as soon as that had been done, my fortunes changed for the better as suddenly as though a benevolent magician had waved his wand over them. Instead of being an ill-paid shop assistant at the beck and call of an employer, I found myself raised all at once to a position of ease and independence, with ample means, and no one to dictate to or interfere with me. And this latter condition was, as may be imagined, decidedly preferable to the former one.

Considering the manner of my departure from home, and the antipathy that had always existed between my step-mother and me, I certainly anticipated that she would now disapprove of me more strongly than ever, and avoid having to do with me as much as possible. But it seemed that the transformation of my circumstances had worked an equally marvellous transformation in her opinion of me; for the tone she adopted towards me was totally different from what it had been in the days of my insignificance, when I could be snubbed and bullied to any extent with impunity. Then she had been all verjuice, gall, and vinegar: now she was all honey, oil, and butter. Then she had pronounced me ignorant, stupid, evil-disposed, tiresome, all that was objectionable, and utterly unfit to be admitted into society: now she sang

my praises unweariedly whenever she had an opportunity, and declared me to be clever, amusing, witty, agreeable, and in every way charming and delightful. How she can have thought it likely for any one of ordinary intelligence to be taken in by such palpable and unblushing humbug, I cannot imagine. Certainly the chief effect it had upon me was to make me feel more disgusted with her than ever, and wonder whether there was *any* limit to her capacity for toadying and cringing when she thought it suited her game to do so.

Of course I knew very well that she would not be thus anxious to curry favour with me for nothing; and that there was sure to be some secret motive for all the lying compliments and fulsome flattery with which she sought to impress me favourably, and to make me forget her former conduct. Very soon this motive became apparent; for the hints she gave showed plainly that, as she found Castle Manor an extremely comfortable abode, she did not at all want to leave it, and was in hopes of being able to establish herself there permanently.

I really must not be offended at her frankness, she said; but I had such a place in her affection and esteem, and she was so anxious for my welfare,

that she could not resist giving me a word of advice, even at the risk of being thought interfering. In her opinion I was too young and inexperienced to live alone, and I should find the management of property a great tie and worry. She did hope, therefore, that I would get some older person to live with me, whom I could regard as a friend; who would set me free to amuse myself by relieving me of business cares when I liked; and who would be always at hand to be consulted in case of need. There would certainly be plenty of candidates for the post of companion to an individual so attractive and popular as I was, to associate with whom would be a constant pleasure and privilege; so I might reckon on a wide field to choose from, as soon as I should make known what I wanted. Till then, was there any way in which *she* could be useful? Would I not like her to stay for a while and help me to settle down comfortably? I had only to say the word, and she would be most happy to fall in with any arrangement of the kind that I might propose.

I, however, had not the slightest wish to have her as an inmate of my house on any terms at all. To forgive her was one thing; to live with her was another. Having learnt that it was a duty to forgive her, I had made up my mind to do so,

and had therefore renounced all intention of revealing her early history and plebeian connections, or making any other attempt to pay her off for past injuries. But beyond that point, it seemed to me I was not bound to go ; and I saw no kind of necessity for inviting her to live with me. She could not be in want of money, as she still possessed whatever she had had when she married my father. And if she disliked solitude, she could go and domicile herself with one of her own daughters—both of whom had got married during my absence from home. Evidently, therefore, there was no possible reason for me to think that I ought to inflict her company upon myself ; and I might, with a clear conscience, turn a deaf ear to her overtures. So, instead of responding as she hoped, I took the liberty of giving her plainly to understand that the sooner she cleared out of Castle Manor the better, as I was in a hurry to occupy my house, and only waited for her departure in order to do so.

I really did try hard not to do anything needlessly harsh by her. But she would *not* go till I put my foot down firmly and unmistakably ; and it was scarcely to be expected that I should, of my own free will and without any feeling of obligation in the matter, ever choose to live in the

same house with her again. So I do not know that I could well have acted otherwise than I did.

Finding that I stuck firmly to my point, she took herself off at last ; whereupon I went straight home, and have lived there the greater part of the time since—endeavouring to the best of my ability to perform the duties of my new position as a lady squire. What with looking after the interests—both physical and moral—of my tenants and poorer neighbours, and managing my house and estate, I have plenty of occupation to keep my brain active and to interest me ; and, consequently, I have taken to this quiet country existence much more kindly than I should have imagined possible in the days when I had not become acquainted, by personal experience, with the feelings of a landowner. But that does not prevent me from contemplating another foreign trip before long ; for my natural spirit of restlessness and adventure is too vigorous to rest satisfied without an occasional indulgence.

My present age is just twenty-four ; but I often find it hard to realise that I am not a great deal older than that, when I come in contact with other young ladies of the same age. I seem to have knocked about the world and seen so much more of it than they have, as a rule, that I can hardly

fancy it possible for the length of their lives and mine to be identical—unless they have wasted their opportunities sadly !

As Kitty Clement has played a somewhat prominent part in these pages, it may be well that I should tell all I know of her career up to this time. Since my restoration I have seen her several times at parties in London, and have, on these occasions, studied her only from a distance ; because, as I am not anxious to be recognised as her former maid, Jill, I do not intend to claim kindred, renew the old acquaintance begun at Lugano, or do anything else that would direct her attention to me. But the strange charm which she always had for me is not yet wholly dead ; and I still cannot help observing her course with an interest which I do not feel in that of any one else. Her great object evidently is, to make her husband a conspicuous figure in the political world. She has persuaded the Premier to appoint him to some government office of minor importance ; receives at her parties hosts of members of parliament, fashionables, and lions, once a week regularly ; and does all she can to increase the influence and popularity of his name in every way possible. If he had anything like her ability, strength, and wits, and were as much above the common run of men as she is

above that of women, her help would certainly make him Prime Minister before long. But, unluckily for her schemes, his talents are in no respect above the average ; and though he discharges the duties of his office in a most pains-taking and praiseworthy manner, yet devotion to work alone will never enable a man to rank as a great leader. Even, however, if her ambition should not be fully gratified, she may at all events congratulate herself on being an extremely great lady, and enjoying a position that many women would deem the acme of felicity. She interchanges dinners with royalties ; her parties are thronged ; and as I frequently see her goings and comings chronicled in the newspapers, I imagine that she has attained sufficient celebrity for the general public to wish to be informed of her movements. And what more than that does the heart of an ordinary woman desire ?

She has presented her husband with an heir to the title, and other children also ; she is spoken of as an exemplary wife and mother ; no breath of slander has ever touched her ; and she is—to all appearance—as perfectly contented with her lot as she certainly has cause to be. As for the feeling she once had for Captain Norroy, I have no doubt it has been crushed to nothing, and that

when he and his wife are amongst her guests, she behaves to them exactly as she does to every one else—that is to say, with a stately graciousness and *aplomb* which seem as though beyond the power of human beings or events to ruffle.

Yet the expression of her face strikes me as being strangely hard and cold for a person so admired and popular as she is, and who is so successful in making herself generally agreeable. It is not the look of a woman who has all she wants, but of one who has incased herself in impervious armour, which she never lays aside, and which no soft emotion can penetrate either from within or from without. And notwithstanding all her prosperity and appearance of contentment, I cannot help doubting whether she is really and in her secret soul happy. Does ambition fill and satisfy her life entirely? Or is there room for any lurking regret for the dream of love that came to her once—the romance that might have been, which is now buried far out of sight, and can never come to life again?

And sometimes, too, I wonder, whether her nature was always as stony as it is now (for even to her husband and children she is rather kind than loving), whether her softness towards Captain Norroy was only the exception that proved the

rule, and whether she ever has felt or could feel genuine, warm affection for other people. She seems incapable of tenderness now; but I am not sure whether before her marriage she may not have had a capacity for loving which she has now lost—perhaps killed deliberately for fear of its proving troublesome to her. And if so, and if in those days she and I had been thrown together (as might very likely have happened, had it not been for my step-mother) as equals instead of as mistress and maid, should we have become friends, I wonder?

Who can say! Now, as always, she is an enigma hard to read.

THE END.

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